Computer active
ISSUE 722 | 5 – 18 NOVEMBER 2025
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From the Editor

I've always hated SIM cards. They're one of the worst examples of fiddly tech – like trackpads, earbuds and ports on the back of monitors – where manual precision is crucial. My fingers feel buttered half the time, so I never found it easy to insert these micro-wafers into the tiny slots inside old phones, nor into the sliding trays of newer ones.

So I was probably one of the first people in the country to switch to eSIMs when they arrived in the early 2020s. I've never regretted it. They make it easy to hop between networks and juggle several phone numbers, and give me the cheapest roaming packages abroad. It's all done electronically inside the phone, with no card to lose or damage.

Robert Irvine is a convert too and reveals the many benefits of eSIMs in our Cover Feature. He also explains where to find the best deals and what to do with your old cards. I hope I never have to handle one again.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

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HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

We use snipcas to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

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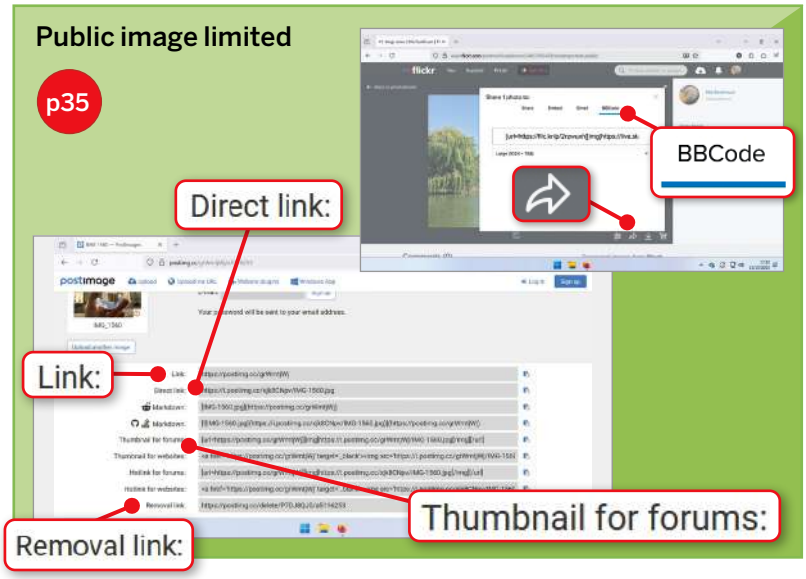


BIN YOUR SIM CARD

COVER FEATURE P50

Why you must switch to an eSIM – CHEAPER, EASIER, SMARTER!

- ☑ Slash roaming bills
- ☑ Scam-proof your phone
- ☑ Use different numbers
- ☑ Switch networks instantly

+ How to find the best deals

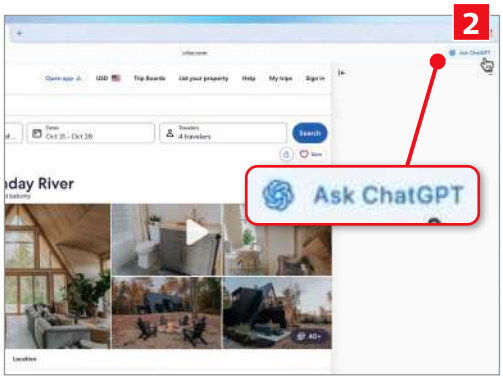
ChatGPT's browser has arrived, but only on Macs

OpenAI has launched a ChatGPT browser in a direct challenge to Google Chrome, but it's currently available only on Apple Macs.

Called Atlas, it doesn't show an address bar by default. Instead, you type your request into a bar in the middle of the screen and wait for ChatGPT to answer.

In effect, this means Atlas uses ChatGPT as the default search engine. But instead of seeing links as in traditional search results, it shows the information you need.

Type a URL into the bar and you need to click the arrow icon to launch the site (see screenshot 1). You can also say the name of the site you want to launch.



Clicking the 'Ask ChatGPT' button at the top right 2 opens a sidebar where you can ask follow-up questions. It has familiar features like tabs, bookmarks, password autofill and an incognito mode.

It's free to search with Atlas, but automated tasks like filling in forms and summarising content requires a paid subscription (from £20 a month).

OpenAI didn't say why Atlas was launched on macOS first, but did confirm it would be coming to Android, iOS and Windows "soon".

Its launch comes a few weeks after fellow AI giant Perplexity made its Comet browser free (see page 74). Both firms are hoping that building AI tools directly into a browser will attract users away from Google Chrome and Microsoft Edge.

Watch Atlas in action at www.snipca.com/56790 and download it for macOS from https://chatgpt.com/atlas.

WHAT WE THINK

OpenAI will have to do better than this if it wants to dethrone Chrome. Ignoring Windows at launch is bad enough, but it's barmy to restrict so many AI tools to subscribers. Very few people will ever pay to browse the web – a lesson Perplexity has already learned. We'll test Atlas thoroughly when it arrives on Windows, but first impressions are underwhelming.

File Explorer blocks previews of web downloads

File Explorer in Windows 11 no longer shows previews of files you download from the web.

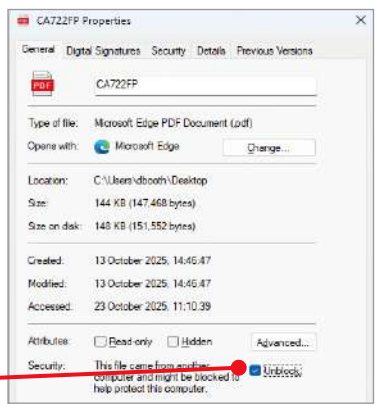
Microsoft made the change via October's Patch Tuesday security updates, released on 14 October, saying it prevents your computer leaking passwords if you preview files that contain HTML tags (www.snipca.com/56793).

Previously, you could preview a file by clicking the Preview button or pressing the keyboard shortcut Alt+P.

But now, if you try to preview a file you'll see a message saying 'the file you are attempting to preview could harm your computer'. The change doesn't affect Windows 10.

You can still click to open a file, but the warning states you should only do this 'if you trust the file and the source you received it from'.

You can also override the block to preview a file by right-clicking it then selecting Properties. Next, click the General tab, then tick Unblock (see screenshot) and click OK.



You'll like this...
NordVPN is making a VPN for Amazon's new Fire TV Stick (www.snipca.com/56797)

but not this...
Russian hackers claim they've stolen RAF files (www.snipca.com/56796)

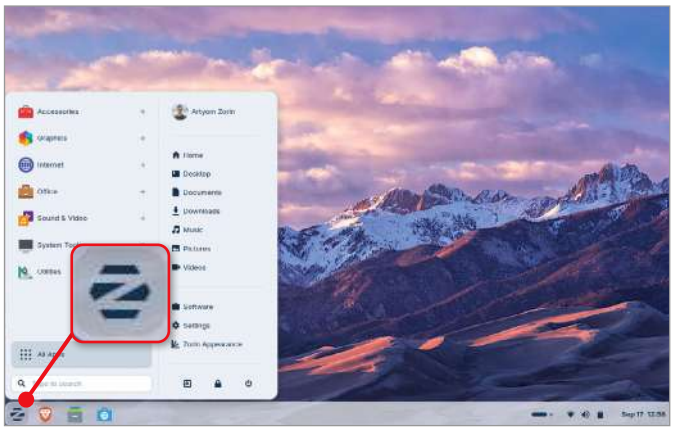
Thousands switch to Linux distro as Windows 10 support ends

A Linux distro that's been designed to look and feel like Windows says it's had record growth since Microsoft ended support for Windows 10.

Zorin Group, which runs Zorin OS, said version 18 of the operating system had been downloaded over 100,000 times since launching on 14 October – the same day Microsoft axed Windows 10.

It said on X that this was its "biggest launch ever" (www.snipca.com/56769) and that 72 per cent of downloads came from Windows users.

It's a sign that increasing numbers of Windows 10 users are switching to Linux rather than upgrading to Windows 11.



Zorin's default layout has a clean, polished Windows-esque look, including a 'Z' icon as a Start button (pictured above).

You can use the Zorin Appearance app to customise the desktop so it feels even more familiar.

Version 18 (see screenshot) redesigns the desktop with a more rounded appearance, while backgrounds and sidebars "have an increased tint, making it more comfortable on the eyes".

Zorin has also added OneDrive support, letting you access online files directly from its file manager – just as you can in Windows. For details visit www.snipca.com/56775.

Have you switched from Windows to Linux? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

FIREFOX TO KEEP SUPPORTING WINDOWS 10

Mozilla has said Firefox will keep supporting Windows 10 for the "foreseeable future". This means you'll continue to receive all Firefox updates, including new features and bug fixes, not just security patches. Read more on Mozilla's blog: www.snipca.com/56770.

No more Android Auto updates on old phones and tablets

Google will soon stop supporting Android Auto on old phones and tablets running Android 8.0, following a recent update.

It released version 15.5 of the in-car operating system in October, though for now it's a beta designed for early testers.

It means that devices running Android 8.0, which came out in 2017, will be stuck on version 15.2.

Google warned users about this change last year by updating the 'What you need' section at www.snipca.com/56777, but delayed the move to allow Android 8 users to receive updates for longer.

The company says that only around one per cent of Android users run version 8.0 on their phones and tablets, while three per cent run Android 8.1.

Any device bought since 2019 is likely to be running Android 9.0 or later. To find out what your device runs, open the Settings app then look in the About section.

The last full update for Android Auto, to version 15.2 in September, has been slammed by many users for breaking the Quick Controls feature.

This lets you control music and view directions even when you're using another app. Several users have complained on Google's forums (www.snipca.com/56776), prompting the 'Android Auto Team' to investigate.

IN BRIEF

APPLE LAUNCHES 'FASTEST EVER' IPAD

Apple has launched a new version of its iPad Pro (pictured) that it claims is the fastest ever iPad, and the first to be powered by its advanced M5 processor. Prices are the same as 2024's model: from £999 for 11in and from £1,299 for 13in (www.snipca.com/56760). We'll review it in our next issue.

META AXES MESSENGER WINDOWS APP

Meta will remove the Facebook Messenger app for Mac and Windows on 14 December. You'll still be able to send messages through the Facebook app itself (www.snipca.com/56764) or online (www.messenger.com). Meta recommends users back up their chats before the app is removed – for instructions see www.snipca.com/56763.

TOMORROW'S WORLD

We don't expect much from robots – just water the plants, do the laundry, wash the dishes and don't kill us while we sleep. This one, from US firm Figure AI, does the first three. So as long as it avoids the fourth it could be a hit. Though we can't see it working as well in reality as in this video: www.snipca.com/56756.

IN BRIEF

VIRGIN SENDS HUB 5 TO CUSTOMERS

Virgin Media has begun sending its Hub 5 router (pictured) to customers still using the Hub 3 or 4. Released in 2021, it supports Wi-Fi 6 and has a 2.5Gbps Ethernet port. It will be sent for free, and customers will be notified in advance. The rollout won't be complete until 2026. Read more at www.snipca.com/56734.

HACKERS STEAL LNER EMAIL ADDRESSES

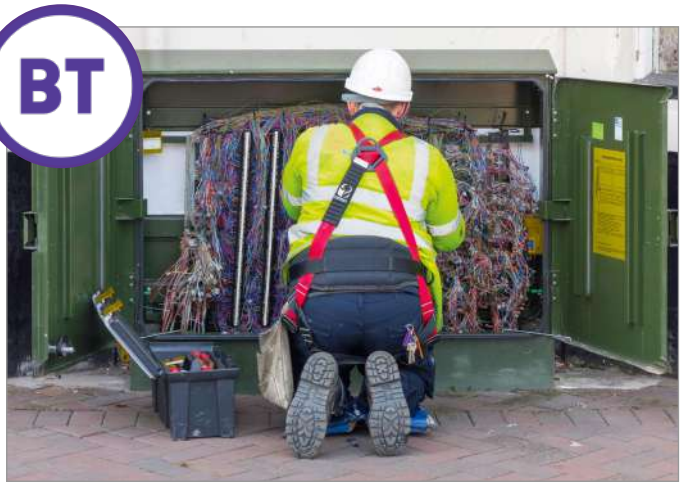
Train operator LNER has emailed customers whose names and email addresses were stolen in a data breach in September. It said no payment details, account information or passwords were leaked. Customers with questions should email **datainfo@lner.co.uk**, where they'll be read by LNER's Data Protection Officer ('John'). Read more at www.snipca.com/56731.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!

David and Tammy Carvey (pictured) from Michigan won $100,000 on the Powerball lottery after 'using' ChatGPT to pick the numbers. Several excited websites presented it as a way to beat the system, as though no luck was involved. Still, we could do with the money, so ChatGPT suggested these for the National Lottery: 3, 12, 19, 25, 36, 44.

Credit Michigan Lottery Connect

Three accused of child abuse after BT engineer crossed wires



Police wrongly accused three people of child abuse after a BT engineer accidentally crossed internet wires in a street cabinet, it has been revealed.

Cops investigating the downloading and sharing of indecent images of children traced the location of an IP address with BT's help under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA).

Dyfed-Powys Police then issued two search warrants for an address, in August 2016 and January 2017, and seized electronic devices.

Officers dropped the case when they couldn't find any wrongdoing, but kept seeing evidence from BT that images of child abuse were being downloaded from the address.

BT then reinvestigated the case and found that approximately eight years previously an engineer had inadvertently crossed wires leading to the home with another address.

None of the individuals were charged, and were released from further investigation.

The details have come out in a report by the Investigatory Powers Tribunal (IPT), raised by the falsely accused trio, who said their rights to a private family life had been infringed.

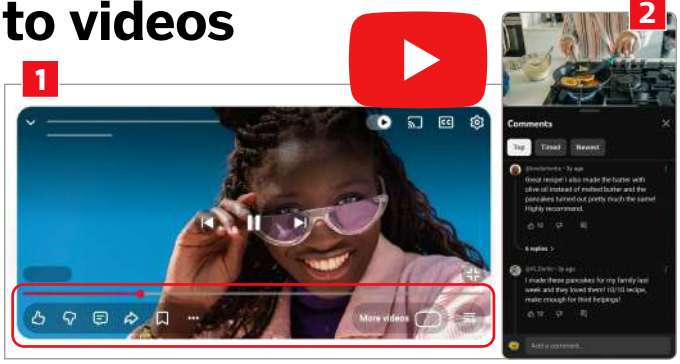
It found that BT discovered the real culprit was living "very close" to one of those wrongly accused, and was then "identified and prosecuted" for child-abuse offences.

The tribunal ultimately ruled in favour of Dyfed-Powys Police, saying the requests to search their homes under RIPA were lawful.

However, it noted that having their properties searched was "distressing for each of the claimants and led to serious consequences which impacted upon their family and work lives".

These included a child being removed from her mother and job offers being withdrawn.

YouTube adds transparent icons and reply threads to videos



Google has redesigned its YouTube video player with semi-transparent icons and buttons (see screenshot 1) to make watching videos "more visually satisfying while obscuring less content".

It said this makes YouTube "cleaner and more immersive", and appears on the mobile, web and TV versions.

Google also says it has improved the 'Seek' feature, which skips forward and back in videos on phones, tablets and touchscreen computers by double-tapping. This will now be "less intrusive" while you're watching a video.

In addition, it now has a "structured system" for showing replies as threads under a comment (see screenshot 2). This makes it easier to see an entire conversation and is common on online forums such as Reddit.

Read more on Google's blog: www.snipca.com/56733.

Retro channel Talking Pictures coming to Freely in 2026

Nostalgia TV channel Talking Pictures will come to Freely in 2026 – one of 10 new channels being added to the TV service.

Launched in 2015, Talking Pictures shows classic British films and TV series from the 1930s to the 1980s. It regularly attracts about four million viewers a month - for its schedule visit www.snipca.com/56667.

Until it arrives on Freely you can watch Talking Pictures on Freesat (channel 306), Freeview (82), Sky (328), Virgin Media (445) and YouView (82).

The other nine channels include business and financial news from Bloomberg TV+ and five channels from US AMC, including True Crime UK and AMC Reality.

There's also Local TV (https://uklocal.tv), covering London, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Leeds, Liverpool, London North Wales, Teesside and Tyne & Wear.

Everyone TV, which runs Freely, said more channels from Channel 5 and ITV will follow.

In October, Channel 4 became the first UK broadcaster to launch streaming-only channels – 4Homes, 4Life and 4Reality – exclusively on Freely. None of these will appear on Freeview or Freesat.

To see Freely's TV schedule visit www.snipca.com/56668.

• Why I don't want to watch Freely – Letters, page 12

FREESAT BOXES LOSE PRIME VIDEO SEARCH RESULTS

Freesat 4K boxes no longer show search results from Amazon Prime Video after an update released on 13 October. You can still watch shows through the Prime Video app. The update, which doesn't affect older Humax Freesat boxes, also lets you access Channel 4's on-demand content by scrolling backwards in the TV Guide. For details visit www.snipca.com/56669. Freesat's 4K boxes cost £230 from www.snipca.com/56671.

Google lets you hide sponsored results – but you need to see them first

Google will soon let you hide adverts in its search results, but only after you've seen them.

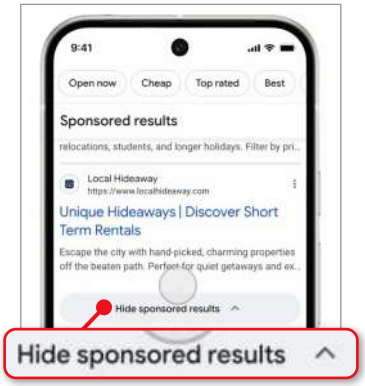
Currently, Google labels each paid result as 'Sponsored'. But it will soon show a section at the top of results, with a single, larger label that stays in view as you scroll.

You can click a button at the bottom of the section to 'hide' the sponsored results (see screenshot right), but you'll have to scroll through them first.

Google said this button lets you "collapse text ads with a single click" if you want to see only "organic" (unpaid) results (www.snipca.com/56665).

It added: "In our testing, we found that the new design helps people navigate the top of the page more easily. The new design keeps the size of ads the same and you'll still never see more than four text ads in a grouping."

Google introduced ads in search results in 2000, calling them 'Sponsored links'. The new design is rolling out worldwide on PCs and mobile.



• Google's mixed messages on adverts – page 21

IN BRIEF

TURN KOBO E-READERS BY REMOTE CONTROL

Kobo has released a remote control for its ebook readers that lets you turn the pages of ebooks without touching the screen. The Kobo Remote is available in black or white (pictured) and costs £24.99 from www.snipca.com/56655. It requires one AAA battery that Kobo says provides "months of uninterrupted reading".

OPENREACH AXES COPPER IN 94 AREAS

Openreach has named the next 94 areas where BT will stop selling copper-based phone and broadband, including exchanges in Barnsley, Colwyn Bay, Great Yarmouth and Walsall (see them all at www.snipca.com/56653). It's the 22nd 'tranche' of exchanges, taking the total to 1,732.

WAYBACK MACHINE HITS ONE TRILLION PAGES

The Internet Archive has now saved one trillion webpages in its Wayback Machine, which captures and preserves old versions of websites. It hit the milestone in October, almost 30 years after it started. It has also saved 100,000TB of files during that time. Read more at www.snipca.com/56654 and search the Wayback Machine at https://web.archive.org.

How did Amazon's bug cause the internet to collapse?

A massive technical fault brought the web to a standstill

Monday 20 October was all set to be another busy day online, with trillions of clicks, searches and transactions. But a problem was developing in one of Amazon's huge US data centres in northern Virginia. At 3.11am (8.11am in the UK) its DNS started to fail. Within minutes much of the internet worldwide had stopped working.

You might wonder what an online retailer like Amazon has to do with running the internet. The answer is Amazon Web Services (AWS), launched in 2006, which rents out computing power and tools so businesses can run websites, apps and online services without building their own data centres.

THE FACTS

- Thousands of websites and programs stopped working for 24 hours after a huge technical fault at Amazon Web Services
- It prevented millions of people from performing everyday tasks online, such as pay bills and send emails
- The problem lay in the DNS used by the database DynamoDB, which stopped responding to requests from websites and software

It's the biggest such service in the world, ahead of rivals from Google and Microsoft. And it makes Amazon a lot of money – $30.9bn in the third quarter of 2025 alone, which was nearly 20 per cent of its overall revenue.

But its importance and size means that when things go wrong, the impact is catastrophic. Listing all the sites and software that were knocked offline would take several pages, but main casualties included Apple Music, Fortnite, GoDaddy, Halifax, HMRC, Lloyds Bank, Microsoft Teams, Office 365, Outlook, Reddit, Ring, Roku and Zoom.

Oh, and Amazon itself.

> "Millions couldn't do things they take for granted: play games, pay bills, read forums, send emails"

Millions of people were unable to perform online tasks they now take for granted: play games, pay bills, read forums, send emails and much more.

It even affected 'smart' beds that use the internet to control temperature and elevation. Some people complained their beds overheated and it was like sleeping in a sauna, while others got stuck in an inclined position (www.snipca.com/56807). Most services resumed within 24 hours, but not before the online world raged at Amazon's failure.

So what went wrong? Amazon posted a 3,700-word explanation on 23 October (www.snipca.com/56806), but only IT experts would have a chance of understanding it. Put simply, a hidden fault in the database DynamoDB meant it couldn't provide the necessary data when websites and programs asked for it.

That fault lay in its DNS, which turns a service's name (like Lloyds Bank) into an IP address that computers can locate and connect to its website (www.lloydsbank.com). It then cascaded through other vital parts of AWS, deepening the problem.

DNS is automated, without much human involvement. The scale of the outage highlighted just how badly things can go wrong when that automation fails.

It also brought home just how reliant tech companies are on Amazon's infrastructure. AWS has about 32 per cent of the market, with Microsoft Azure second (22 per cent) and Google Cloud third (10 per cent). Experts have been warning for years how risky it is for companies to depend on just one company for its online services. This outage could be the wake-up call that prompts them to spread their websites and software across other providers.

Amazon apologised for the outage, acknowledging it "impacted many customers in significant ways". It added: "We will do everything we can to learn from this event and use it to improve our availability even further."

For the average user, it's a reminder how much we rely not just on the internet for everyday tasks, but on incredibly complex systems that make those tasks possible. When they stop working, so does much of the modern world.

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

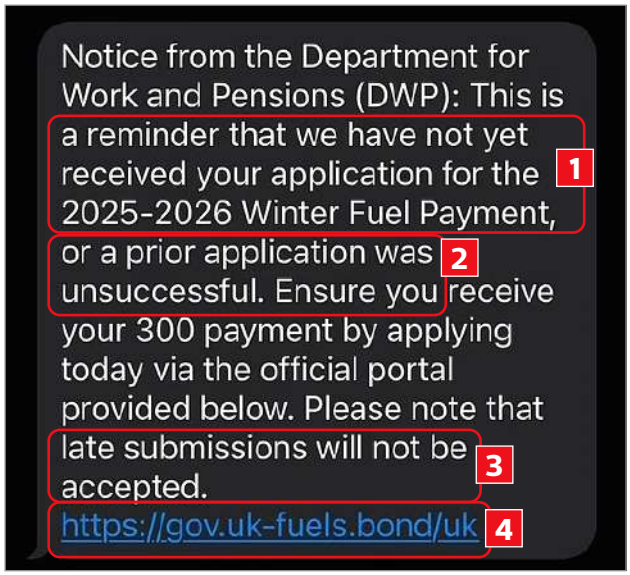
Sharp rise in Winter Fuel Payment scams

What's the threat?

There's been a sharp increase in scam text messages urging you to apply for 2025-2026 Winter Fuel Payments. Reports of these rose by 153 per cent in the final week of September, the Government said, following a decline over the summer.

The messages typically claim to be from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and say it hasn't received your application to receive the payments (1 in our screenshot) or that a "prior application was unsuccessful" 2.

It tries to add some urgency by saying "late submissions will not be accepted" 3. The link appears genuine because it begins 'https://gov.uk' 4 – clicking just that section takes you to Gov.UK's homepage. But the rest of the URL is fake and leads to a scam site that steals your details.


Notice from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP): This is a reminder that we have not yet received your application for the 2025-2026 Winter Fuel Payment, or a prior application was unsuccessful. Ensure you receive your 300 payment by applying today via the official portal provided below. Please note that late submissions will not be accepted.
https://gov.uk-fuels.bond/uk
1
2
3
4

How can you stay safe?

Winter Fuel Payments worth up to £300 will be issued automatically between mid-November and December 2025. You don't need to apply for them, so ignore any messages requesting this and report it to the National Cyber Security Centre by texting 7726. Visit Gov.UK to find out if you're eligible for payments: www.snipca.com/52471. The site contains all the contact info you need.

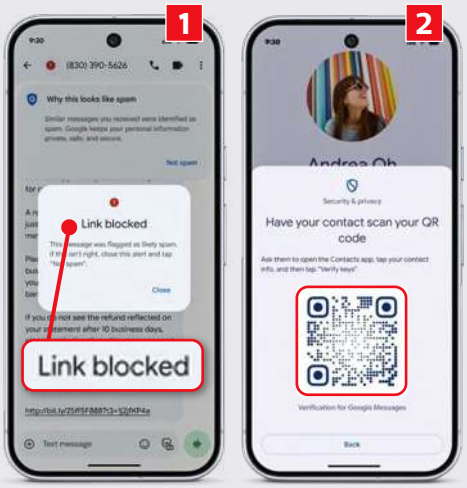
Scammers will continue to send messages throughout the winter, trying various tactics such as claiming to be from different Government departments. Last year, for example, they sent texts from the 'UK Government Living Allowance Office'. Also beware any messages mentioning the change in Government policy, announced in June, that pensioners earning up to £35,000 will receive payments. HMRC says it has taken down 4,600 scam sites related to the payments.

New tools | Scam warnings in Google Messages

Google Messages now warns you if you tap a link in a suspicious text. It says 'Link blocked' (see screenshot 1) and the only way you can visit it is by marking it as 'not spam'.

It's one of several new features Google has added to boost security. Another clever tool is Key Verifier, which lets you scan a QR code when a trusted contact gets in touch, to confirm they're genuine and not an impersonator 2. This works on devices running Android 10 (released 2019) and later.

Just as useful are Google's new Recovery Contacts, which let you select trusted friends or family members to help verify your identity if you're ever locked out of your account. You can do this by clicking Security on the left in your Google Account (https://myaccount.google.com).



Visit www.snipca.com/56691 to see all the tools Google has launched. They're being rolled out to all users worldwide.

ScamWatch
Readers warn readers

'Insurer declined Licence Fee payment'

Over the years I've received a few scam emails and texts about my TV Licence payment being refused. But a recent email adopted a slightly different angle by claiming my 'insurer' has declined my Direct Debit. What would my insurer have to do with it? Perhaps the scammers were hoping to trick people by first confusing them, then hoping to reassure them if they clicked the link in the email.

It didn't work on me because I paid for my licence in one go earlier this year, and I know the money has already gone out.

Les Moxon

Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

Upgrade to Windows 11? I've never left Windows 7!

It was interesting to read about people migrating "backwards" from Windows 10 to 7 (Issue 721, page 7). I never left Windows 7, nor XP before that, or even DOS for absolute mission-critical work.

There could be a backlash against Microsoft and its insistence on 'upgrades' being forced on to Windows 10 and 11 users, much as when some phone updates can leave third-party software unable to run. I had this problem when my Samsung phone updated and my own software stopped working. Result? I never update my phone now. Android shoots itself in the foot.

I guess that fewer people actually trust Microsoft but have to suffer these updates due to a fear of malware that seems to abound in greater numbers with each passing day. In addition, Windows 10 and 11 offers me absolutely nothing extra that I can't do in XP and 7. However, I can't guarantee that my utopia won't be ruined by a pesky update.

Dr Alec Butterworth

My dad rejoiced when he could skip TV adverts

Bill Fleming is right to point out that the quality of adverts has been deteriorating since the 1980s (Letters, Issue 721), but I still think he's looking back with rose-tinted glasses. I remember my father rejoicing when he got his first TV with a remote control, some time in the mid-1970s. His main cause for celebration was being able to switch channel easily from ITV to BBC 1 or 2 (only three channels back then!) so he didn't have to watch "those bleedin' adverts". I guess before then getting off his armchair five feet away was too much effort!

Roger Coxhill

Upgrading Virgin TV box will ruin my setup

In Issue 720, you mention Virgin TV pushing us to upgrade the V6 box to the TV 360 (page 69). I want to make people aware of another reason not to upgrade. My TV setup must be similar to what many readers have. I have a V6 box in one room and use an RF digital modulator to convert the signal from the V6 HDMI output to an RF Coaxial cable, which – through an RF distribution box – goes to several TVs throughout my house.

For each TV I have an infrared 'magic eye' – a small sensor that receives signals from the remote and sends them back to the V6 box. This lets me control the box from any room, so I can pause a programme in one room and resume it in another. I also have remote controls for additional rooms. We've used this system for years and it works well.

The reason I haven't upgraded is because I wondered why Virgin had to send you a new remote control to work with TV 360. The original V6 box can use both infrared and RF remote controls. But the new V6 software only works with RF. This means it doesn't need to 'see' the V6 box, but has a limited range. Virgin says it works from a distance, but I'm unable to use the remote from another room.

The infrared remote control is only compatible with my system, which means my setup will come to an end when Virgin forces us to upgrade. I'm now looking at replacing the V6 with a Manhattan Freeview box, and cancelling my subscription channels.

Andy Maguire

Forget Freely – I'm sticking with Freeview

I agree with James Ross (Star Letter, Issue 720) that not everyone will be embracing Freely, either because they are not online or because they prefer what they know. I'll be keeping a tight hold of my Freeview service for as long as I can, despite having a fast internet connection, because I record everything and watch whenever I like. I can do that with streaming, but I can't fast-forward through adverts, and streaming services delete programmes and series on a whim.

Freely prohibits recording on any device. For me, this will be a huge step backwards. It takes me 40 minutes to watch an hour-long programme recorded from a commercial channel and my recordings don't disappear.

Ethel Trueman

We live near the final approach flight path for our local airport. The terrestrial TV signal is broken every time a plane lands – very annoying. We

What's the Issue...?

I recall reading a very clever How To recently on backing up two-factor phone codes. When was it?

James Reynolds

CA SAYS In Issue 713, page 35. Buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/56628.

I can't find the best mobile reception in my new house. Didn't you explain how an app can do this?

Richard Greene

CA SAYS Robert Irvine did in his 'Easy When You Know How' column – Issue 714, page 74. Buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/56629.

When did you explain how to use Shotcut's AI to add subtitles to videos?

Peter Barlow

CA SAYS In Issue 698's Workshop (page 38). Read it on our 2024 Back Issue USB Stick: www.snipca.com/53180.

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were recommended Freesat instead, which works well, though we lose HD signal during storms. But now one of our Freesat receivers is playing up and I believe Freesat is on the way out, so Freely may become our only option.

Also, in Issue 719 (page 53) you mentioned that Amazon added a 'Live' tab to its Fire Sticks. This sounded perfect to me so I ordered one, but it simply displays the associated TV channel apps and a TV guide app which, when selected, takes some time to populate the guide with the programs for the 'live' channels. Once you select a program to view, it still has to load the player app and before loading the selected program.

To make matters worse, the default ITV channel is ITV1, which is fine if you don't live in Scotland (or didn't put a Scottish postcode in at setup). Selecting a programme on ITV1 loads the ITVX player, which tries to load the selected programme but eventually shows the message 'This show isn't available' along with the comment that 'You can try finding it on STV'.

This happens even when the same show is being broadcast simultaneously on ITV1 and STV. This is not Amazon's fault – it's down to a far from seamless relationship between ITV and STV, but there may be implications for other UK regions.

I'm sharing this so you can understand, and perhaps share with readers, some of the problems with live TV over broadband. I hope that when the Humax Freely box is released, it addresses the issues I have with the Fire Stick alternative.

CA SAYS **It's clear many readers remain unconvinced by Freely. But at least the service now has a decent range of channels, and is adding more all the time – see page 9.**

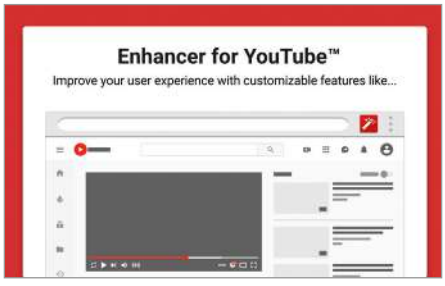
Dear Santa: tell YouTube to improve its player

In response to Graham Hollingsworth's tip on reloading Adblock Plus to block YouTube adverts (Issue 720, page 40), for Christmas last year I asked for an upgrade to YouTube Premium, which removes ads. I resented having to pay £12.99 myself for it.

While my ad-free YouTube would now be hard to live without, it's still poor value. It gives access to YouTube Music, but I prefer Spotify. I find YouTube's playback tools pathetic compared with those in the free and wonderful 'Enhancer for YouTube' browser extension (www.snipca.com/56649, pictured below). The download function is complicated and not worth the bother. Also, the playback options don't work on every video.

I live in forlorn hope that YouTube will reduce the Premium cost to make it more generally appealing, but first they need to massively improve their expensive and basic player. These gripes aside, a renewal will be top of my Santa wishlist again this year.

Tom McCleary



CA SAYS **Christmas may have come early for Tom this year, because in October YouTube redesigned its video player (see page 8). What do you think of it?**

Online shopping prevents haggling

Although I happily embrace online shopping, I do find it kills the opportunity to haggle over prices. Purchasing such things as house insurance, mobile-phone packages and furniture with a few clicks of the mouse takes away the chance to ask the vendor, "What's your best price?" – and then looking unimpressed with their answer. Chatbots don't really give a proper human response, so we're increasingly being forced to accept the asking price without questioning it. Where's the fun in that?

Alan Thomas

STAR LETTER

I forced my laptop to run Windows 11 and it's faster than ever

I've just successfully upgraded an old Windows 10 Acer laptop to 11 despite it not meeting Microsoft's technical requirements. This came as a pleasant surprise. But what came as an even bigger surprise is that the laptop is running smoothly.

Every time you've given instructions on bypassing Microsoft's technical restrictions to upgrade from Windows 10, you've mentioned that it carries risks. I'm sure you're right to do so. It's responsible journalism. But if your laptop is rather old, what have you got to lose?

I had a choice in early October: attempt this bypass trick or spend money I don't really have on a new computer. So I followed the instructions in Issue 718's 'Windows 10 Survival Guide' on using Flyoobe (www.snipca.com/56031) to get round Microsoft's requirements. I was impressed that it kept your files and settings. I also followed Issue 720's Workshop (page 38) on using Flyoobe to remove junk that comes bundled with Windows 11.

The overall result is a revitalised laptop that runs Windows 11 faster than it ever used to run Windows 10. I realise I may have got lucky and my laptop might eventually struggle when it attempts to install Windows updates. I probably wouldn't have tried the trick if my laptop had been newer. But then, if it was newer, it almost certainly would have met Windows 11's specifications.

So yes, there's a risk involved, but it's less of a risk than actually running Windows 10 unsupported. And you can easily mitigate that risk by backing up your system using Hasleo (www.snipca.com/56040). I did that, but fortunately didn't need to use it.

Larry Peterson

The **Star Letter** writer wins a **Computeractive** mug!

Consumeractive

We stand up for your legal rights

Why has McAfee charged me for a second antivirus?

LEAD CASE

Q I've been using McAfee antivirus on my PC, two laptops and a smartphone, paying £109.90 a year for protection across unlimited devices. Last June, I bought another laptop, which had a trial of McAfee on it. However, because of severe illness I wasn't able to set up the laptop for six weeks. When I finally did this, I found that McAfee had started another unlimited subscription on it, and charged me another £109.90. I obviously don't want or need this, but I can't contact McAfee about this. Will you be able to help?

Patricia Goodall

Unlimited Devices
McAfee+
Advanced
1-Year Subscription
Subscription automatically renews. A payment method is required to complete activation – cancel anytime.

A We'll certainly do our best because it seems that McAfee began Patricia's subscription automatically after the free 30-day trial ended on her new laptop. If so, we need to find out whether it automatically opted her into a subscription (which is illegal), or Patricia unintentionally agreed to it.

We also need to find out how McAfee got Patricia's bank details and why it chose the same subscription (unlimited) she's already paying for.

It seems odd that McAfee didn't identify Patricia as a customer with an existing subscription who therefore didn't need another one. Patricia says she has now deleted McAfee from all her devices, even though she was entitled to use the existing subscription until January.

But that won't get her money back, so Patricia should tell her bank the payment was unauthorised and demand a chargeback. She has 120 days to make this claim. McAfee took the money in August, so she has until some time in December. We'll also contact McAfee and try to work out what's happened.

CASE ONGOING

Should Evri compensate me for damaging item I sold?

Q I have a problem with Evri damaging an eBay item I sent to someone. I've refunded the buyer despite it being Evri's fault, but I haven't received any word or compensation from Evri despite filling in the compensation form. Am I due compensation?

Steve Knight

A It depends what item Steve sent via Evri and what it was worth. Evri includes standard parcel cover of up to £20 on most deliveries (www.snipca.com/56704), which you can increase to £999 for an extra fee – typically four per cent of the item's value plus VAT. Some items, such as glassware, electronics and collectibles, are excluded from compensation if they're damaged in transit – see www.snipca.com/56703.

Steve did the right thing in refunding the buyer. If he hadn't the buyer could have raised this case through eBay's Money Back Guarantee (www.snipca.com/56705). We've asked Steve for more information on the item he sent. We've also told Evri to stop ignoring his request for more information.

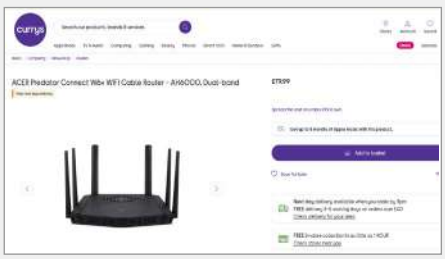
CASE ONGOING

CASE UPDATE

Currys refunds reader after router came with two-pin plug

Currys has agreed to give Paul Ferris a full refund of £79.99 for the Acer Predator Connect W6x router he bought online (see Issue 718). The retailer had initially rejected his complaint that it hadn't made it clear the router comes with a continental two-pin plug, making it incompatible with the UK's three-pin system.

Paul couldn't have used a shaving adapter as a solution because they're designed for low-power devices such as shavers and electric toothbrushes.



Currys had said Paul should contact Acer for a replacement or refund. This was nonsense because as the retailer it had full responsibility for dealing with Paul.

We're glad he's been refunded, but Currys should not be selling the router with a two-pin plug. Under the Electrical Equipment (Safety) Regulations 2016, retailers must convert it to a three-pin plug, or include an adapter for using it in a three-pin socket. It wouldn't be enough for Currys to simply state in the listing (www.snipca.com/56710, pictured) that the plug is two-pin. We'll tell Currys this and let you know if it responds.

Can I keep a router TalkTalk sent in error?

Q I recently signed up for another two-year contract with TalkTalk and was sent a new router. I decided to use it and keep my previous one as a spare. I later received a letter from TalkTalk explaining that the new router was sent in error and asked for it to be sent back. Do I have to return it?

Gavin Hay

A Yes, legally Gavin should return the router. By law, goods sent in error still belong to the sender, unless they explicitly tell you otherwise. However, Gavin doesn't have to pay to return it, or inconvenience himself to do so. TalkTalk did supply a return bag and postage label, so he has no right to keep it. He can however tell TalkTalk it must make the effort to collect the router, rather than ask him to go to a post office or contact a courier.

That said, Gavin could argue that because he's set up the new router he wants to carry on using it. He could then offer to return the old model instead, saying he shouldn't be forced to reset his options and passwords just because of TalkTalk's error. TalkTalk could refuse his request, but it should at least consider it and give him a reason for its decision.

CASE CLOSED

Are rights for eBay auction wins different to normal purchases?

Q What are my rights if I win an auction on eBay, but the product that's delivered bears no resemblance to what I bid on? I know I can return items bought outright, but does the process of bidding change this?

Liam Prendergast

A No, buying an item by auction doesn't change Liam's rights. They're the same as when buying new or second-hand goods: you're entitled to all your money back for goods not as described. You can also say they are not fit for the purpose they were said to be. The issue should be resolved by the eBay seller, but it's unlikely you'll have much luck if they are conning you, especially if they're based overseas.

If the seller doesn't respond or refuses to help after three days, you should escalate the complaint to eBay's Money Back Guarantee scheme (www.snipca.com/56709). This not only covers faulty items and those that don't arrive, but also goods not matching the description.

If the amount is over £100 and you used a credit card you could instead lodge a claim with your card provider under Section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act. You can also ask your bank for a chargeback if you used a debit card. However, a chargeback is not a legal right. If your bank refuses, escalate your claim to the Financial Ombudsman Service which would investigate, but it's not guaranteed you will get a refund.

CASE ONGOING

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

I bought liyama monitor at 4pm – it arrived next morning

I've twice bought liyama monitors from Continental Ltd (www.iiyama-monitors.co.uk) and the service has been excellent on both occasions. A few years ago, I ordered two items in one purchase, and they emailed me to say they'd be arriving in two separate deliveries. This was very helpful. The lady I spoke to was polite and seemed to know monitors inside out.

More recently, I treated myself to a £500 55in ProLite 4K liyama monitor (pictured). I ordered it at 4pm and it arrived the next morning – amazingly fast, and well packaged too.

After a couple of days' use I still couldn't work out how to control the LED bar, so I emailed for assistance. They replied within an hour with instructions that were easy to follow. Superb company. They've never let me down.

Steven Palmer

Has a company impressed you with its customer service? Please let us know: editor@computeractive.co.uk

Contact
Continental

- **Online form** www.snipca.com/56716
- **Phone** 01452 855 222

Grow Your Family Tree

If your ancestors fought in World War 1's largest naval battle, follow **Richard Holt's** advice to...

Search Battle of Jutland crew lists

The Battle of Jutland, fought off the coast of Denmark between 31 May and 1 June 1916, was the largest naval engagement of World War 1. It began when 151 Royal Navy ships encountered 99 from the German fleet. Around 100,000 men took part, with Germany losing 2,551 and Britain 6,097. More than half of the British losses came from the sinking of HMS Indefatigable, HMS Invincible and HMS Queen Mary.

Filter results by dates, rank and ship names

You can search Ancestry's 'Battle of Jutland Crew Lists, 1916' database for free, though you do need to sign up for a free account (www.snipca.com/56656). Its 61,495 records include both men confirmed as taking part in the battle, and those who *may* have been present.

Sign into Ancestry then visit www.snipca.com/56657 where you can search by name, filtering by dates, rank, ship name and more. Searching for a ship's name without any other details shows its crew list.

None of my ancestors fought, so instead I checked whether anyone from my hometown (High Wycombe) was present. This led me to Edward Fassnidge, born in 1897, who initially joined the Isle of Wight Rifles, but was discharged for being underage.

Ancestry's results show that Edward Fassnidge died on HMS Chester on 31 May 1916

Ancestry told me Edward was a Private in the Royal Marines Light Infantry (1 in our screenshot above). He joined HMS Chester on 2 May 1916 2 and died during the battle on 31 May 3. It mentions a document at The National Archives, which led me to his entry in the Register of Service (www.snipca.com/56661) – from where I downloaded it. It showed that HMS Chester was Edward's first ship.

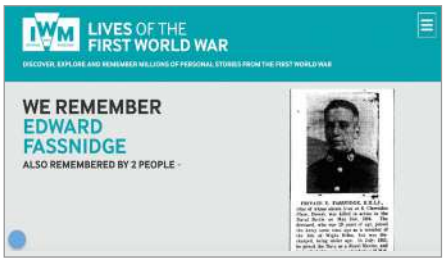
Richard found a photo of Edward Fassnidge...

Browse crew lists from Battle of Jutland Project

Ancestry's data is taken from the Battle of Jutland Crew Lists Project, run by volunteers. Search its lists by visiting www.snipca.com/56658 then clicking one of the ships listed. It colour-codes names to indicate the probability they took part, from green (confirmed) to yellow (unconfirmed canteen staff) – all explained at www.snipca.com/56659.

The website has information not found in Ancestry, including photos. I found one for Edward Fassnidge (1 in our screenshot below left), which shows green 2 to confirm he served.

That photo was taken from the Imperial War Museum's 'Lives of the First World War' website (www.snipca.com/56660, see screenshot below), which cited a letter sent to Edward's mother explaining "he died fighting bravely at his gun".



...which led him to Imperial War Museum's 'Lives of the First World War' site

Your **Genealogy** Problems Solved

I'm trying to trace a couple of great-aunts who were sent to Canada as British 'Home Children' in the 1910s – or possibly 1920s. Where should I start?

Kath Slater

There are three records at Findmypast, though you'll need to subscribe. First look in the Home Children Inspection Reports (www.snipca.com/56663), which contains children in Canadian foster homes and the agency that sent them. You can use this info to search the 'Canada, Home Children Immigration Records Index, 1869-1930' (www.snipca.com/56662). Finally, try the 'HomeChildren Board of Guardian Records' (www.snipca.com/56664) for children sent to Canada from English workhouses.

Have a genealogy question for Richard? Email letters@computeractive.co.uk with 'Grow Your Family Tree' in the subject line.

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But there's a catch – magnesium oxide isn't always easy for some of us to absorb, and taking lots of it can lead to an upset stomach.'

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It also stays in the body longer. Magnesium+ includes vitamin B6, which helps reduce tiredness and supports energy metabolism.

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- **Highly Absorbable Formula:** Magnesium lactate for better absorption, easy on the stomach
- **Added vitamin B6:** Helps reduce tiredness and fatigue and support normal energy metabolism

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***Magnesium contributes to a reduction of tiredness and fatigue, normal energy-yielding metabolism, muscle function and normal psychological function and the maintenance of normal bones. Magnesium+ also includes vitamin B6, which contributes to the regulation of hormonal activity. Food supplements should not be used as a substitute for a balanced diet and healthy lifestyle.** Introductory offer valid for new UK customers only. Offer expires 31st December 2025. See FutureYouHealth.com/MGF645 for full terms and conditions.

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Best Free Software

Robert Irvine recommends new programs that won't cost you a thing

SYSTEM TOOL

Wintoys 2.4.12.0

www.snipca.com/55189
What you need: Windows 10 or 11

Wintoys is one of our favourite free tools for optimising Windows, and is particularly useful for removing junk files and unwanted software (see page 20 for instructions). It's been updated with a host of new features and enhancements, which give you even greater control over how your PC works.

Wintoys' Storage cleaner can now clean the caches of different versions of browsers, including Chrome Canary, Edge Beta and Firefox Nightly, as well as Windows logs. A new Others option removes junk from built-in Windows features, such as Widgets and Remote Desktop, and Wintoys now scours more thoroughly for temporary files.

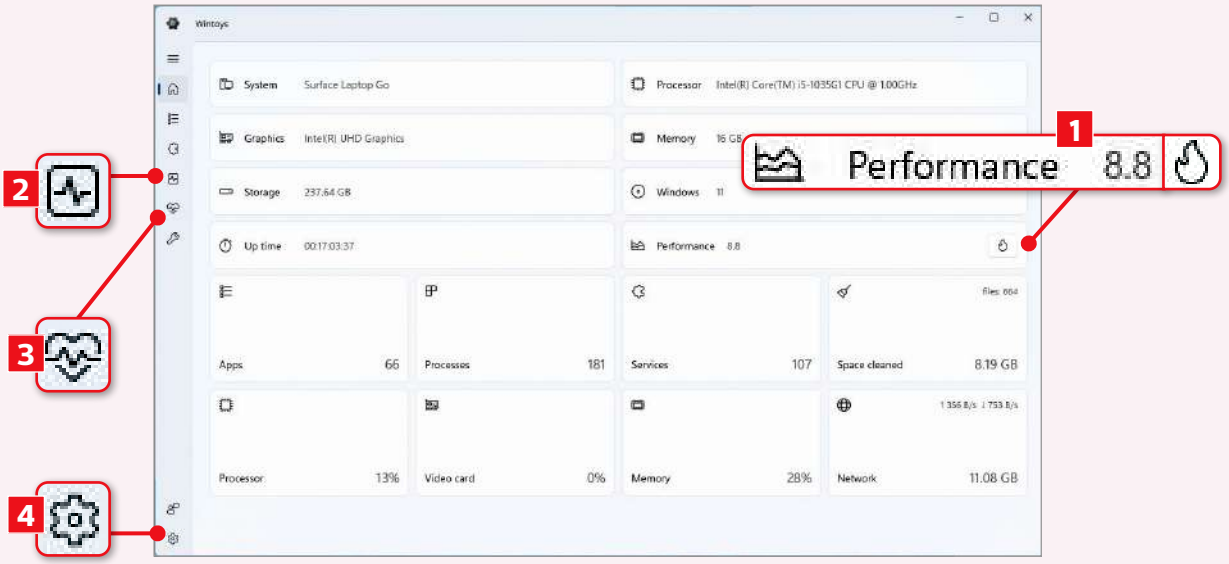
Usefully, you can now see how much free space is available on your main hard drive before you perform a clean-up, and the number and total size of files you've selected to delete. Wintoys also tells you how much space system restore points are consuming, and warns you that deleting them all is irreversible ("consider a backup"). The Storage cleaner was previously called Junk, but has been renamed because "not everything is junk".

Wintoys has improved its 'Startup apps' feature to list all programs and services that run on Windows startup in a pop-up box. This makes them easier to browse, disable and enable – Wintoys also tells you how long your PC last took to boot.

Another change is to the Performance benchmark function on the Home screen. This now rates your PC's performance using a score out of 10, rather than a star rating, which Wintoys' developer says was 'confusing'.

There's also a handy new 'Driver updates' option in the Health section. This automatically updates your device drivers when you install a Windows update or connect new hardware.

Wintoys is fully compatible with Windows 11 25H2, and will continue to support Windows 10. Additionally, it's now possible to run it via Command Prompt, by typing wintoys and pressing Enter.



1 The Performance feature on Wintoys' Home screen uses the Windows Experience Index to evaluate the performance of your PC's processor, memory, graphics and main hard drive, and score it out of 10. Click the flame icon to run the benchmark test.

2 Click the (separate) Performance icon in the left-hand menu to access the 'Startup apps' feature. This controls what runs when your PC boots. You can also stop programs running in the background and disable Windows search indexing.

3 Click the Health icon to access the 'Cleanup' options. As well as the Storage cleaner mentioned above, Wintoys can clear the Microsoft Store cache, File Explorer history and system restore points, and reset your network settings.

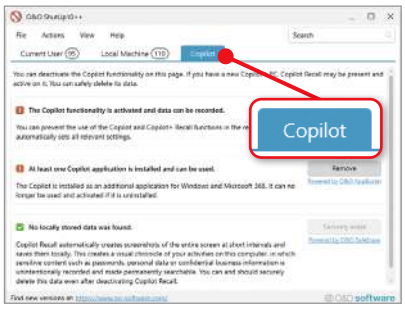
4 To change which section is displayed each time you launch Wintoys, click the Settings cog in the bottom-left corner. Click the dropdown menu next to 'Landing page' to choose between Apps, Services, Performance, Health and Tweaks.

PRIVACY TOOL

O&O ShutUp10++ 2.0.1009

www.snipca.com/56757

What you need: Windows 10 or 11



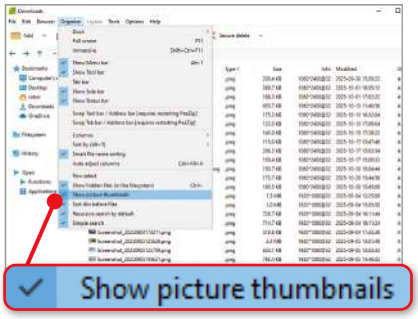
Although it's due a new name, O&O ShutUp10++ remains one of our favourite free tools for tweaking invasive and annoying Windows settings. This new version – the first since February – takes aim at Copilot, with a new tab devoted to Microsoft's AI assistant (see screenshot). This lets you disable Copilot functionality in the Windows registry, and remove the Copilot app if you never use the chatbot. The removal option is powered by its sister tool O&O AppBuster to ensure all traces of Copilot are erased. O&O ShutUp10++ can also deactivate the controversial Recall feature on Copilot+ PCs and delete all the screenshots it's captured. Usefully, the program now displays the number of available settings for the Current User and Local Machine (your entire PC) on their respective tabs.

COMPRESSION TOOL

PeaZip 10.7

www.snipca.com/56761

What you need: Windows 10 or 11, macOS or Linux



This popular tool for creating and extracting archives has been updated to improve its file manager. It now includes an image viewer that shows thumbnails of files, in addition to their names, to ensure you add the right items to archives. This option is disabled by default but you can switch it on by clicking the Organize menu and selecting 'Show picture thumbnails' (see screenshot). PeaZip's image viewer can also display full-size pictures in a new window when you right-click them and choose 'File manager' then 'Show images' – or select them and press the Space bar. This even works with images inside archives. Additionally, PeaZip has increased its number of supported archive formats to 242. PeaZip triggers a SmartScreen warning, but it's safe to use so just click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.

SHOULD I PAY FOR...?

Choose the right version of software

Bluetooth Battery Level

www.snipca.com/56774

Price: 79p **Free trial period:** 7 days

What you need: Windows 10 or 11

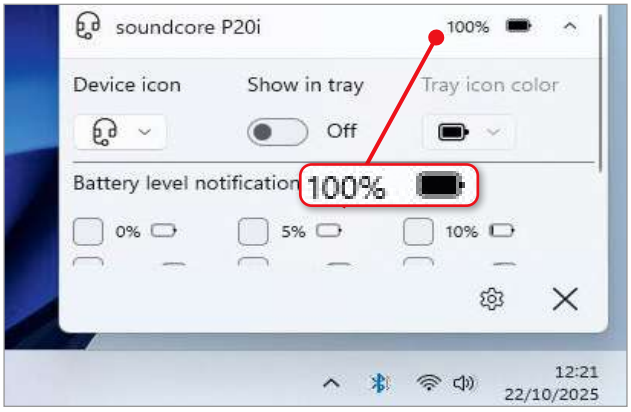
Bluetooth has revolutionised the way we connect devices to our PCs, eliminating the need for unsightly cables. You don't even have to insert a USB receiver, as you do with wireless mice and keyboards. The only snag is when a device runs out of battery and requires recharging.

Bluetooth Battery Level offers a convenient way to monitor the battery levels of all your Bluetooth-connected devices in one place. These include your mouse, keyboard, headphones and speakers, as long as the manufacturer provides this information.

Although you can view battery status in the 'Bluetooth & devices' section of Windows Settings, this Microsoft Store app makes it much easier to do so. Simply click its icon in your system tray – this looks like the standard Bluetooth logo, but with a connection symbol on the right – to view a list of detected devices (these must already be paired with your PC).

You'll see the current battery level next to each entry (see screenshot). Click the down arrow to change the device's icon and add it to your system tray, so you can hover your cursor over it to view the battery status. You can also change the icon's colour.

Bluetooth Battery Level lets you set up notifications, to alert you when a device's battery level drops below a certain percentage. Click the Settings cog to set the app to run automatically when Windows starts.



OUR VERDICT: Pay for it

For the bargain price of 79p, this is an essential app if you have several Bluetooth devices. Try it for free to make sure it detects the ones you've paired with your PC.

What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

What's a simpler junk remover than BleachBit?

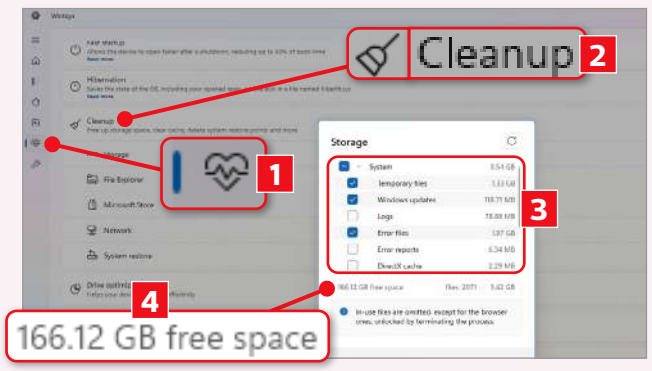
Q I've been a long-time user of BleachBit (www.bleachbit.org), but I'm finding it harder to use. It still removes junk when I set it to, but it seems to have added so many settings that I don't need. Is there a simpler alternative?

Roy Lawrenson

A We agree that BleachBit's settings can appear daunting, and may do more harm than good if you change, remove or disable something you shouldn't. A far simpler alternative is Wintoys, which you can download for free from the Microsoft Store (www.snipca.com/55189). It has a beautifully simple design that's similar to Windows itself.

First, click the Health icon on the left (1 in our screenshot) then Cleanup 2. This gives you options to tidy up Storage, File Explorer, Microsoft Store, Network and 'System restore'. Click 'Storage', for example, and you'll see tickboxes for removing items such as temporary files, Windows updates, error files, browser caches (including for Brave and Opera since version 2.0.81.0, released in April) and more 3. It shows below how much space you'll free up 4.

Uninstalling unwanted software is also easy. Click Apps on the left, then find the program you want to remove. Now click the three horizontal dots at the far right followed by Uninstall. If you're unsure what a program is, click Search to read about it online. This works reliably for well-known software, but when we tried it for Perplexity's Comet browser (see page 74) it took us to news reports of the interstellar comet 3I/ATLAS! See page 18 to discover what's new in the latest version of Wintoys.



Is there an app that lets me type large letters on my phone?

Q I live with someone with communication difficulties and often have to write messages in very large letters for them to understand. Bit of a long shot, but is there an app that I can type large letters into? I use a Samsung Galaxy A53 phone running Android.

Dawn Hutchins

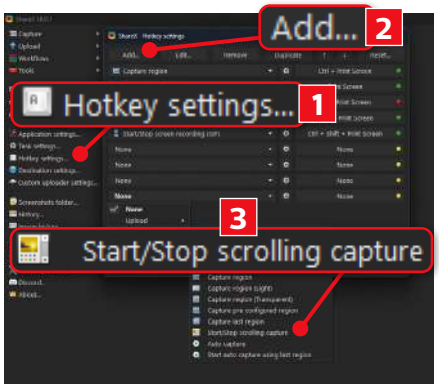
A Yes, try 'Large Text – Signboard' (www.snipca.com/56630), which also lets you add emojis as a visual aid (see screenshot). It remembers your past messages, which you can show again with a single tap. Light and dark themes are free and should be enough for most people, but you can pay for more expressive ones.

Can I remove scrollbars from scrolling screenshots?

Q Is there a screenshot program that lets you remove the scrollbar from screenshots it takes? These always appear at the bottom when I take scrolling screenshots, and I'm fed up having to always crop them out.

Malcolm Dempsey

A ShareX (https://getsharex.com) added this option to version 17, released in January. It ignores the bottom 50 pixels of your screenshot, which means the horizontal scrollbar won't be included. Click 'Capture' at the top left then 'Scrolling capture'. You can also set a keyboard shortcut to trigger a scrolling screenshot by clicking 'Hotkey settings' (1 in our screenshot) then Add 2 followed by 'Screen capture' then 'Start/Stop scrolling capture' 3.



Email us your questions at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Named & Shamed

Keumars Afifi-Sabet puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and software trying to trick you

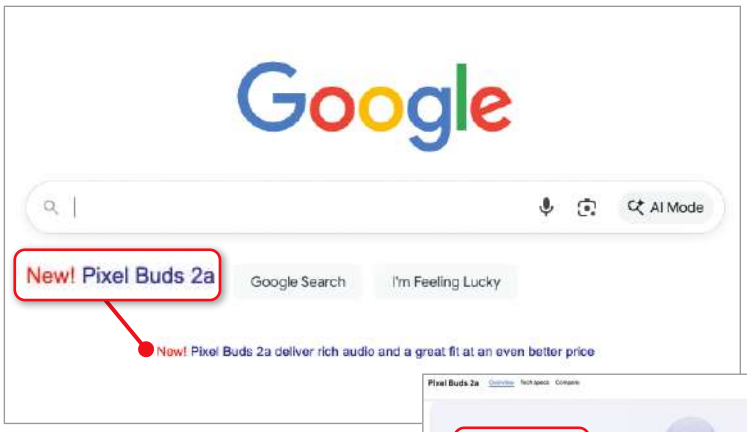
SOFTWARE WARNING!

Google advertises its earbuds on its homepage

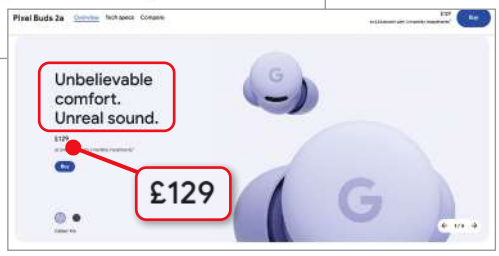
I've come to expect rows of sponsored listings muddying Google's search results. But it's now showing me adverts before I've even typed anything. This recently appeared on Google's homepage (www.google.com) just below the search box: 'New! Pixel Buds 2a deliver rich audio and a great fit at an even better price' (see screenshot right). Well, that's good to know – thanks Google!

It's presented as an innocent link, as though Google has some important news to deliver. But click it and you're taken to Google's online store (www.snipca.com/56651), where you can buy the Buds for £129 (see screenshot right). The earbuds have 'unbelievable comfort' and 'unreal sound', apparently. I'd say Google's marketing shows unbelievable cheek and unreal arrogance.

I spotted the ad on the same day Google announced it was letting users 'hide' sponsored results (see page 9). Talk about mixed messages. With one hand Google finally admits that sponsored results have become a problem. And with the other it shoves ads on to its own homepage. Such behaviour demonstrates why the Government wants to restrict Google's search dominance in the UK (www.snipca.com/56650).


Google
AI Mode
New! Pixel Buds 2a
Google Search
I'm Feeling Lucky
New! Pixel Buds 2a deliver rich audio and a great fit at an even better price

Google should leave its homepage for searching, not advertising its products



Unbelievable comfort and unreal sound? More like unbelievable cheek and unreal arrogance

Of course, Google might claim it's not an advert, but a promotion for its own product. This is the kind of nonsense Microsoft comes up with when stuffing notifications for its apps across Windows. If it looks like an advert and quacks like an advert, then it's an advert.

Which neatly brings me to my favourite alternative search engine: DuckDuckGo. Use that instead.

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

WHAT THEY SAY

Opera on its new browser cat (pictured)
www.snipca.com/56648
"We know you love Opera Air's built-in mindfulness tools, and so we thought you might love a digital companion too – and what better than that most mindful of creatures, the cat? Always in the present, hyper aware of sensory experiences, masters of non-judgmental acceptance of the self – cats have much to teach us if only we'd watch and learn."

WHAT THEY MEAN

We're mindful that we may have completely lost the plot. Time for a catnap.

KEUMARS' VILLAIN OF THE FORTNIGHT

Det Con Niall Thubron

Instead of writing anything here, I'm tempted to just type 'HHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH'. Yes, that's the letter H pressed 30 times, which is all Detective Constable Niall Thubron (pictured) did while working from home for 90 minutes on 3 December 2024. To be fair, he then upped the pace by pressing the 'I' key more than 16,000 times.

He thought this 'keyjamming' would fool bosses into thinking he was working hard catching criminals rather than watching reruns of *Traffic Cops*. But at a Durham Police misconduct hearing in September it was revealed he pulled this trick on 38 occasions across 12 separate days between December 2024 and January 2025.

Thubron, who resigned in May, has been banned from working for the police again. Who's going to hhhhhiiiiire him again?

Credit: X

MINI PC | **£430** | from Amazon www.snipca.com/56684

GMKtec NucBox M6 Ultra

Watts: the big idea

In Issue 719 we tested Chinese manufacturer GMKtec's NucBox G10 (www.snipca.com/56114), and while it's very cheap at just £270 and delivers solid performance in office software, its six-year-old processor gave us pause for thought. It left us wondering whether GMK could squeeze more power out of a mini PC with more cutting-edge components. The M6 Ultra goes some way to answering that question.

> "Lets you choose 35, 45 or 50 Watts to stop it overheating"

Where the G10 is built around the AMD Ryzen 5 3500U chip (released in 2019), the M6 comes with the two-year-old Ryzen 5 7640HS. You not only get two additional cores and four more threads (for six cores and 12 threads in total) to ensure improved video and image-editing. It also includes support for DDR5 memory and PCIe 4.0 SSDs for much faster file-transfer speeds.

All that extra muscle is not without its drawbacks. More cores means higher power consumption and temperatures. To tackle this, GMKtec has included three separate power profiles that let you swap between 35, 45 and 50 Watts, depending on the level of performance you need. 35W would be ideal for a little browsing or light productivity tasks. For image or video editing, or a quick session in Microsoft's Flight Simulator, you'd need 50W.

These improvements to the G10 come with a steep price increase – from £270 to £430. While that might seem justified, the M6 Ultra has 500GB less storage – the basic model now includes only a single 512GB SSD and 16GB of RAM. That makes the higher price a little harder to swallow.

However, the improvement in performance is significant. We ran the M6 through our usual benchmark tests, using its 50W profile in various demanding processor tasks, and it comfortably beat the G10. In gaming, the gap was even more pronounced, and thanks to the superior graphics on the Ryzen 5 7640HS, the M6 Ultra came out on top. That said, don't expect to play the latest games on maximum settings.

The difference was less noticeable in office-based programs and browsing, however, with both mini PCs performing well – particularly when using multiple monitors.

The M6 is slightly larger than the G10 at 44x112x117.5mm (HxWxD) – the extra room is needed to accommodate the larger fan, which is very effective at keeping the newer processor cool. There's also a set of vents below the ports, enabling plenty of airflow and a VESA mount so you can attach it to your monitor and save desk space.

It has plenty of ports too. The M6 has a 3.5mm audio jack, three USB 3.2 ports (one more than the G10), a front-facing USB-C port, a rear USB 2.0 port, plus HDMI and DisplayPort outputs. It also doubles to two the number of 2.5Gbps Ethernet ports. Wireless connections are provided by Bluetooth 5.2 and the much faster and more reliable Wi-Fi 6E standard.

If these power improvements still aren't enough, GMKtec also sells the M6 Ultra without the memory and storage (£222 with postage) so you can add your own. Upgrades are easily done by popping the lid off and removing four screws around the fan.

The M6 Ultra offers well-rounded performance, solid build quality and broad connectivity. But it doesn't replace GMKtec's NucBox K11 as our favourite mini PC (see page 32) because it's slower, and lacks the OCuLink link for graphics cards. However, at this price, you'd be hard-pressed to find better.

SPECIFICATIONS

Six-core AMD Ryzen 5 7640HS processor • 16GB RAM • AMD Radeon 760M graphics • 512GB SSD • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.2 • 2x2.5Gbps Ethernet ports • 1x HDMI port • 1x DisplayPort • 1x USB-C port • 3x USB 3.2 ports • 1x USB 2.0 port • Windows 11 Pro • 44x112x117.5mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty
www.snipca.com/56684

VERDICT With strong performance levels and a reasonable asking price, the M6 Ultra is an ideal choice for anyone looking for a capable mini PC on a budget

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE GMKtec NucBox G10 £270 It may not rival the M6 in more demanding gaming and editing tasks, but at this price, it's a real bargain

PC | **£1,000** from Game www.snipca.com/56688

Medion Erazer Bandit P20

All guns blazing

We know gaming isn't for everyone, but if you're interested in other resource-hungry tasks such as video and image editing, a gaming PC will make your life so much easier. That's why Medion's latest Erazer Bandit P20 is such a tempting offer. The German PC manufacturer has delivered a nicely compact desktop PC that crams some of the best current components into its slender case, all at a price that won't break the bank.

> "Medion has done a great job of balancing a compact design, power and price"

Inside is a 10-core Intel Core i5-14400 processor. Although Intel recently replaced this with the Ultra Core series, the older chip is actually significantly better at tasks that require higher clock speeds such as video editing and gaming. On the downside, it uses more power than the more efficient Ultra chips, but you get faster editing and better in-game performance, particularly at Full HD resolution.

The processor is backed by 16GB of RAM, a 1TB SSD and one of Nvidia's latest RTX 5060 8GB graphics cards. It achieved impressive results in our benchmark tests at both 1080p and 1440p resolutions. Frame rates rarely fell below 60fps – and that was at 1440p with high graphical settings. There are many games that will push the graphics card a little harder than our tests, but with the help of Nvidia's AI upscaling technology (known as DLSS) even those will run at 50fps or more, ensuring smooth, beautifully crisp visuals.

Medion has squeezed all this into a tight little case that measures just 347x215x401mm (HxWxD). The processor is cooled by a Cooler Master Hyper4 OEM air tower, while five fans push air through the case. As with many PCs designed for gaming, the fans emit coloured light and there's no way to control this or turn it off, which could be a pain if you're downloading something overnight and need to leave the PC on. The fans also produce a noticeable hum even when you're just browsing the web.

Connectivity is provided by two USB-A ports, a 3.5mm jack plug and a USB-C port on top of the case where they're within easy reach. At the rear there are two USB 2.0, a 10Gbps USB-C, two USB 3.2 ports and a 1Gbps Ethernet socket. The Bandit also supports Wi-Fi 6E and has three audio ports: Mic in, Line in and Line out.

You get a lot for your money here. From the handy size and high build quality to the fantastic performance in demanding software, Medion has done a great job of balancing performance and price. The RGB light show and fan hum are disappointing, and we've seen more memory in models with a similar price and specification (such as PCSpecialist's Frostbyte Elite, reviewed in Issue 715 www.snipca.com/55417). Nonetheless, the Bandit is an excellent all-round desktop PC for those who want productivity, creativity and a bit of fun.

SPECIFICATIONS

Ten-core Intel Core i5-14400 processor • 16GB RAM • 8GB Nvidia GeForce RTX 5060 graphics card • 1TB SSD • Wi-Fi 6E • Windows 11 Home • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/56688

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Future PLC, which employs a team of specialist technical reviewers. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every phone and tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Future PLC also owns the magazines *PC Pro*, *T3* and *What Hi-Fi*, and the websites Tom's Hardware (www.tomshardware.com), TechRadar (www.techradar.com) and Windows Central (www.windowscentral.com). This means we can test thousands of products before choosing the most relevant for *Computeractive*.

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

Our writers follow strict guidelines to ensure the reviews are fair and impartial. The manufacturer has no involvement in our tests.

OUR AWARDS

We award every product that gets five stars our Buy It! stamp of approval. It means we were extremely impressed by the product, and we think you will be too.

Every product that gets a four-star review is given the Recommended award. We highly recommend these products, although they just fail to meet the high standard of our Buy It! winners.

PRICES

Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

VERDICT A powerful and compact desktop PC that's as comfortable gaming as it is video editing

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

PCSpecialist Frostbyte Elite £999 With twice as much RAM, the Elite is slightly better at intense editing tasks

PC/KEYBOARD | **£192** from The Pi Hut www.snipca.com/56693

Raspberry Pi 500+

Blows the budget

A blend of classic 1980s Commodore design and modern hardware, we were very impressed by the original Raspberry Pi 500 (£96 from www.snipca.com/56696) when we reviewed it in Issue 702. Having a Linux-based budget PC hidden away inside a reliable chiclet keyboard, ready to go, made it far easier to set up than previous generations of the Pi, and its performance levels were good enough to handle light office work and web browsing – all at a respectable price.

> "Its new SSD makes the 500+ remarkably snappy, but it costs almost the same as a mini PC"

It wasn't perfect, however. The lack of a dedicated SSD meant load times were slow, and RAM was limited. Enter the Raspberry Pi 500+.

This new piece of kit from the British manufacturer fixes that first downside by introducing an easily accessible, full-sized 256GB SSD (it still has a microSD card slot as well). Simply remove four Phillips screws from underneath the keyboard, then use a plastic pry tool to pop off the base, and you'll see your M.2 slot. Meanwhile, the RAM has doubled to 16GB, letting you run more apps simultaneously without your desktop freezing.

The other major change involves the keyboard. Raspberry Pi has ditched the chiclet version of the older 500 model and opted for a fully mechanical setup instead (available in white only). This replaces those soft key-switches for clicky ones, which feel great to type on. The tactile response and audible feedback from each key press is a delight, but it won't be for everyone. It's very similar to typing on the classic IBM Model M keyboard (www.snipca.com/56697). The keys are fully illuminated, with RGB lighting, all of which can be controlled through Raspberry Pi's included software.

Otherwise, the main specifications remain practically identical. You still get two microHDMI ports (capable of supporting 4K monitors), two USB 3.2, one USB 2.0 and a Gigabit Ethernet socket (all pictured below).

There's also dual-band AC wireless, Bluetooth 5.0, that microSD card slot, and the same ARM processor running as fast as before. It also runs the same Raspberry Pi OS, based on Debian Linux.

Performance is strong in every area. That SSD makes the 500+ remarkably snappy, with rapid load times of under 20 seconds for the operating system, while moving files around feels seamless compared with the microSD limitations of the original 500. In our testing for light office and web browsing, the 500+ performed smoothly with no major issues. In fact it's easy to forget you're using such a small PC.

The big problem, however, is the price. The Pi 500+ costs £192 for the base model. That goes up to £211.20 if you want the desktop package, which includes a mouse, beginner's guide, power cable and microHDMI-to-HDMI cable (www.snipca.com/56694).

Compared with the original 500 you're effectively paying £96 extra for a small SSD, twice as much RAM and a decent keyboard. In fact, the price is not far off what you might pay for a mini PC or Chromebook.

For example, GMKtec's G10 (www.snipca.com/56114), which we reviewed in Issue 719, is just £80 more, and you get far superior performance, an SSD that's four times the size, and Windows 11.

When you also consider it has the same processor as both the 500 and the Raspberry Pi 5 (released in 2023), which has almost the same specs but is even cheaper at just £76.80 for the 8GB model (www.snipca.com/56695), it makes the 500+ difficult to justify.

SPECIFICATIONS

Four-core Broadcom BCM2712 ARM processor • 16GB RAM • VideoCore VII graphics • Wi-Fi 5 • Bluetooth 5.0 • 2x USB 3.2 ports • 1x USB-C port (power only) • 1x USB 2.0 port • 2x microHDMI ports • MicroSD card slot • Gigabit Ethernet port • 40-pin GPIO header • 35.76x312x123mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty
www.snipca.com/56693

VERDICT Its storage, RAM and keyboard have all been improved, but it's simply too expensive

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Raspberry Pi 500 £96 The original 500 delivers similar performance, but at half the cost

SMARTPHONE | **£474** from ao.com www.snipca.com/56754

Fairphone 6

Right to repair

Dutch company Fairphone has been around since 2013, but has operated in the shadows of the likes of Samsung, Apple and others. That's a shame because the Fairphone 6 is unique for being the the only smartphone you can easily repair yourself.

The overall specification is fairly average. The processor is Qualcomm's Snapdragon 7 Gen 3 from 2023, which is good enough for everyday use, performing well in our benchmarking tests, but not as powerful as, say, the Exynos chip in Samsung's latest Galaxy S25 FE (£650 from www.snipca.com/56702).

> "Its hefty design lets you replace almost every component"

It has 8GB RAM and 256GB storage, which again is a little disappointing. Battery life is also modest. Although a single charge will last you a day – thanks to its 4,415mAh capacity – it does take a while to recharge due to its limited 30-Watt charging speed (giving you 50 per cent in around 25 minutes), and there's no wireless charging. As for connectivity, you get Wi-Fi 6E, Bluetooth 5.4 and a USB-C port.

The design, though, is something else. Available in black, white or green, and measuring just 156.5x73.3x9.6mm (HxWxD), with a 6.3in 2484x1116-pixel OLED screen, it's remarkably compact, yet surprisingly thick.

That chunkiness is mostly down to the recycled plastic plating around the display. This gives it military-grade MIL-STD-810H protection, along with IP55 dust and water protection.

More importantly, its hefty design lets you replace almost every component in the phone, if needed. By removing just a few screws on the back, and by watching Fairphone's video tutorials (www.snipca.com/56711), you can install a new battery for just £34.78, or the entire screen for £78.

In fact, you can replace all the camera lenses, USB ports, speakers, microphones, the lot – all at reasonable costs. This should help the Fairphone 6 last longer than many rival phones. Fairphone promises seven years of software support too, taking you up to Android 25.

The camera setup – although it works perfectly fine – lacks the post-image processing of more expensive phones, and therefore colours often look washed out or dull. It still has a 50-megapixel main lens, a 13-megapixel ultrawide unit, and a 32-megapixel front-facing camera, but you'll be spending a lot of time editing snaps afterwards to really bring them to life.

SPECIFICATIONS

Octa-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 7s Gen 3 processor • 8GB RAM • 6.3in 2484x1116-pixel resolution 120Hz OLED touchscreen • 256GB storage • 50-megapixel rear camera • 13-megapixel ultrawide rear camera • 32-megapixel front camera • IP55 ingress protection • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.4 • Android 15 • 156.5x73.3x9.6mm (HxWxD) • 193g • Five-year warranty www.snipca.com/56701

VERDICT Average performance, but its repairability means it'll last much longer than many rival phones

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Samsung Galaxy S25 FE £650 More expensive, but the performance level and design are leagues ahead

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

LiDAR

What is it?

Standing for Light Detection and Ranging, LiDAR is a remote sensing method for measuring distances and creating high-resolution 3D models of the Earth's surface and other objects.

How does it work?

It bounces infrared light out into an environment, either through tiny fixed-angle mirrors or via a rotating mirror mechanism. The former, known as consumer LiDAR, is found in high-end smartphones such as the iPhone 12 Pro (pictured) and later.

Phones use LiDAR for features such as adjusting autofocus in real time to enhance your photos. This is especially helpful in low light, because LiDAR tells the camera exactly where objects are in 3D space. Augmented-reality apps can use it to calculate the size of rooms, people and objects with a high degree of accuracy.

Rotating mirrors are used in robot vacuum cleaners for avoiding walls and furniture, and mapping the fastest way to clean a room. Drones also use it to avoid objects.

What are the specs?

Many manufacturers don't reveal the specs of their LiDAR in phones. Instead it's best to look at how a device performs in certain conditions. How well smartphones handle low-light photography is a good indicator, because LiDAR uses infrared light to create superior shots in low-lit conditions.

Can I change it later?

You can't remove or turn off LiDAR on devices that include it, but as LiDAR has no downsides, there's no real reason to do that. It draws a very minimal amount of power when in use.

EARBUDS | **£179** from Amazon www.snipca.com/56749

Nothing Ear (3)

Nil paid

Nothing, the quirkily named British company, has gained a reputation for delivering exceptional smartphones and earbuds since launching its first phone in 2022. We reviewed its Nothing Ear (a) earbuds back in Issue 684 when they were £80, but Amazon has been selling them for £70 recently (www.snipca.com/56753) and they remain among the best budget ANC earbuds available. In fact, you'd be hard pressed to find better – with the only close competition being Sony's WF-C700Ns (£69 from www.snipca.com/56707).

The beautifully designed Ear (3)s are effectively the successor to the Ear (a), but they come with one major caveat, and that's the price – a steep £179. That's far higher than any of Nothing's previous buds, and only £40 cheaper than Apple's AirPods Pro 3 line (www.snipca.com/56708) – though they come with heart-rate monitoring, live translation and longer battery life.

The good news is that, from our testing, audio quality is just as good as on Nothing's previous model. The Ear (3)s provide an incredibly energetic sound, no matter which genre of music you play.

There's perhaps a little too much emphasis on high frequencies, but the ANC performs admirably thanks to the three microphones in each bud. In our testing it cut out all but the harshest of noises (even blocking out a hairdryer). Nothing has also included extensive support in its app, with an equaliser sound optimisation test, a find-my-headphones tool, and a fit test that helps you to identify the most comfortable ear tips.

The star of the show, however, is what Nothing calls its 'Super Mic'. This is a dual-beamforming microphone array built into the case that you can use like a walkie-talkie. If you own a Nothing phone you can make voice notes by holding down the button on the side of the earbuds' case and have them transcribed to Nothing's app. Alternatively, you can simply use it as a mic to take calls, and its active noise cancelling is incredibly effective.

Battery life is a little disappointing with the buds lasting just five hours 30 minutes with ANC enabled, and 22 hours with the case. But you do get 10 hours and 38 hours respectively with ANC disabled. On the plus side there's Bluetooth 5.4, waterproofing up to IP54 rating, and LDAC codec support for high-resolution audio on Android devices.

The problem lies with the price. Without a Nothing phone for that voice-note transcription, the Super Mic is nothing special. And while the ANC and audio quality are excellent, they're no better than the much cheaper Ear (a)s.

SPECIFICATIONS
12mm drivers • Active-noise cancellation • 38-hours listening time (with noise cancelling off) • Bluetooth 5.4 • 56x55.5x22.25mm case (HxWxD) • 71.4g (including case) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/56706

VERDICT Brilliant audio and noise cancelling, but it doesn't justify paying £100 more than the Ear (a)s

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE
Nothing Ear (a) £69 Fantastic noise cancelling, decent battery life, high-quality audio and getting cheaper

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

What's the best 16in laptop for my requirements?

Q I need a new laptop with a 16in or 17in screen, 32GB RAM, 1TB SSD, Windows 11 Home, a built-in webcam and microphone, Bluetooth 5.1, and multiple USB ports. I've always found Intel processors excellent, but I'm open to other options. My budget is up to £1,500.

Evelyn Reid

A We recommend the Acer Swift AI 16 (pictured). Although we've not reviewed this exact model, we did take a look at the smaller 14in version in Issue 696 (page 23). It's available from Currys for £1,299 (www.snipca.com/56744) and it's perfect for what you need, despite being £200 under your budget.

It has two USB 3.2 and two Thunderbolt 4 USB-C ports. It's also got 32GB RAM, a 1TB SSD, an Intel Core Ultra 7 processor, and an outstanding 16in 2880x1800-pixel OLED screen, with vibrant colours, and a super-smooth 120Hz refresh rate. As for connectivity, you get Bluetooth 5.3 and Wi-Fi 7. There's an impressive Quad HD webcam, along with an integrated microphone.

If you do need additional USB ports, buy Acer's £28 hub (www.snipca.com/56745). This gives you additional USB 3.0, Ethernet, HDMI, SD card reader and VGA ports.

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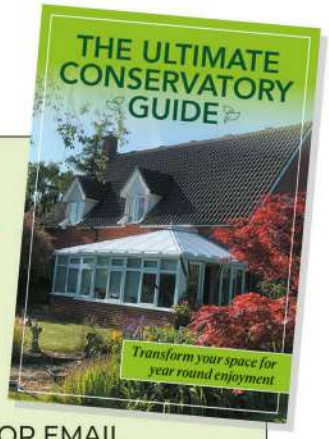
Anne Bird, Bristol



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KEYBOARD | **£50** from Keychron www.snipca.com/56712

Keychron B36

Flip the switch

At £50 the B36 keyboard from Chinese manufacturer Keychron is aimed at those looking for a no-frills unit with plenty of versatility. This isn't a backlit, gaming keyboard with mechanical switches, but for the price it's impressive.

Typing is incredibly comfortable. Keychron uses scissor switches, instead of the usual membrane option you'd find at this price. These are taller than the typical low-profile switches and lubricated, making them exceptionally quiet and smooth to use.

There's wireless connectivity, with Bluetooth 5.2 and a Wireless 2.4GHz USB dongle, as well as a wired USB-C connection. That's backed up by an 800mAh battery giving you around 320 hours of use – or alternatively you could simply keep the cable plugged in.

The best feature is dual-system compatibility. A simple switch on the back lets you swap between macOS and Windows profiles – all of the key caps are labelled for use on both operating systems.

There's another switch next to this, allowing you to instantly swap between Bluetooth and Wi-Fi. Simply connect the B36 to your Mac via Bluetooth and to your Windows PC with the Wi-Fi dongle, for example, and the switch will let you flip between the two machines in seconds.

It does take a while to get used to those elevated key switches, but otherwise the B36 is a great keyboard.

SPECIFICATIONS
Full-size layout • Bluetooth 5.2 • Wireless 2.4 GHz • USB-C • Scissor switches • 26x437x131mm (HxWxD) • 320-hour battery life • 650g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/56712

VERDICT A budget keyboard that lets you instantly swap between operating systems and connection types, and it has incredibly quiet keys

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Dell Pro Wired Collaboration Keyboard KB525C £40 Built with Microsoft Teams and video calls in mind, it's ideal for anyone who just wants the essentials

BLUETOOTH SPEAKER | **£50** from Amazon www.snipca.com/56713

Edifier ES20

Sounds amazing

Edifier's on a roll with its latest speaker models, and the ES20 is perhaps the most interesting of the lot. This tiny handheld unit (at just under 10cm tall) with lush retro-styling delivers exceptional audio quality for an incredibly low price.

In our testing, music output was punchy, with well-balanced, warm bass and mid tones, while trebles really stood out. At this size, you'll never get the beefiest bass notes, and when you do ramp up the volume, there's noticeable compression at higher frequencies, creating a little distortion, but it's a small quibble.

Edifier does provide a set of equalisers in its ConneX app – including Music, Gaming, Movies and Outdoor modes – but it's hard to distinguish between them and none are configurable.

The ES20 also features a noise-cancelling microphone that lets you take calls directly, and there's a little ambient backlighting that does impact battery life, but can be disabled if you prefer.

Charging is handled by a simple USB-C cable, and you can expect around 15 hours of battery life at 50-per-cent volume from a full charge with lighting switched off. This beats rivals like the JBL Clip 5 (£46 from www.snipca.com/56714), which only manages 12 hours.

Other notable features include IP67 ingress protection; four buttons on top to control playback and connectivity; a nifty leather travel strap; and support for the SBC codec (although no LBAC for hi-fi audio lovers). Connectivity is handled by Bluetooth 5.4 alone.

With a slight upgrade to the app and the ability to adjust those equaliser profiles, the ES20 could be the perfect small speaker.

SPECIFICATIONS
6W total power output • 15-hour battery life • Bluetooth 5.4 • USB-C for charging • 93.7x90.4x49.7mm (HxWxD) • 326g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/56713

VERDICT Affordable with impressive audio and a timeless design, the ES20 may just be the best portable speaker available

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE JBL Clip 5 £46 It's small, with top-quality audio, although you can't stand it up, and the equaliser is limited

EXTERNAL SSD | From **£204** from Scan www.snipca.com/56722

LaCie Rugged SSD4

Tough choice

LaCie's line of external hard drives enjoy a reputation for being among the most rugged in the business. With their distinctive orange rubber bumpers and lifeboat-style design, they certainly look the part.

The French/US manufacturer has just released four capacities of its latest USB 4.0-compatible SSD, and they're certainly not cheap. 1TB starts at £204 (www.snipca.com/56723); 2TB for £420 (www.snipca.com/56724); and 4TB for an eye-watering £600 (www.snipca.com/56725).

The reason they're so expensive is because they can take advantage of that nifty USB 4.0 connection standard, which gives them a theoretical maximum speed of 40Gbps on devices that support it. Compare that with USB 3.2 drives, which top out at just 10Gbps. File transfers are effectively four times as fast, making it fantastic for transferring video and photos while out and about.

This isn't the first USB 4.0 drive we've tested – Corsair's EX400U (£180 for 2TB from www.snipca.com/53939, reviewed in Issue 705) was similarly equipped, but over £20 cheaper. That drive reached impressive speeds in our tests, maxxing out at 3,625 MB/s on write speeds and 4,050 MB/s on read speeds. During benchmarking, the SSD4 consistently beat that, scoring 4,058 MB/s on reads and a staggering 3,741 MB/s on writes.

We did encounter one small problem during testing. Initially, we were using one of GMKtec's EVO-T1 mini PCs (£1,156 from www.snipca.com/56726), with an external graphics card. To activate that card, the PC effectively had to throttle the max speed on its USB 4.0 port to just 20Gbps. So bear in mind, even though you might have a USB 4.0 port, it may not run at full speed. Check your PC manufacturer's specifications before committing to purchasing any USB 4.0 drive.

The rubber sides add a decent layer of protection, and is rated to survive a three-metre drop. However, the non-waterproof USB port means it's only IP54 rated and can handle a few splashes, but that's about it.

Another frustration is that it only comes with a USB-C-to-USB-C cable. If you need to connect to a USB-A port, you'll have to buy your own adapter, although that will be limited to USB 3.2 speeds. Included software is also fairly basic, comprising simple backup tools. LaCie doesn't throw in any online back-up services or any additional features, outside of a three-year data-recovery service.

Despite these drawbacks, its blistering speed makes it a great purchase – especially if you need tough protection for your files when outside.

SPECIFICATIONS

Available in 1TB, 2TB and 4TB capacities • USB 4.0 • Speeds up to 4000MB/s • Backup software included • 67x106x106mm(HxWxD) • 108g • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/56722

VERDICT The fastest external hard drive we've ever tested, and is robust enough to survive most falls

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Corsair EX400U £180

Cheaper, and it's almost as fast, with the same IP54 rating.

DO I REALLY NEED...

A toilet bowl smart camera?

What is it?

The Dekoda from US firm Kohler Health (www.snipca.com/56773) is a battery-powered smart camera (pictured) that attaches to the rim of your toilet, facing down into the bowl. It uses multiple sensors to analyse your family's waste.

What does it do?

Through spectrometry, it looks at your excretions, and studies the shape, size, consistency and how light reacts with it to provide an insight into your gut health. It'll even spot blood and other warning signs, and alert you via a smartphone app.

What's the catch?

It costs $599 (about £450), while the app requires a $12.99 monthly subscription, increasing in price depending on how many people you have in your household.

So can I do without it?

Yes. If you do have any health concerns, you should consult a medical professional, not a smart toilet.

NEXT ISSUE

On Sale Weds 19 Nov

Wired2Fire AMD R8845
Powerful British-made mini PC – is it worth £600?

iPad Pro
Comes with the mighty M5 processor, but what else is new?

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Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

MSI Prestige A16 AI+
£1,100 from www.snipca.com/55962
Tested Issue 718

A powerful Copilot+ laptop with 32GB of RAM and a 1TB SSD to guarantee fast performance. Screen is excellent too, while battery lasts an impressive 17 hours.

ALTERNATIVE PCSpecialist 16 Fusion British-made laptop with superb screen and built for advanced AI tasks. £956 from www.snipca.com/55094

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Cobra
£400 from www.snipca.com/43515
Tested Issue 643

This fast PC is a mouth-watering bargain, with 16GB of RAM, a 2TB SSD and a six-core processor – though it lacks USB-C ports and built-in Wi-Fi.

ALTERNATIVE Wired2Fire Ultima WS Home Office Workstation Blisteringly fast PC, powered by an overclocked eight-core processor and 1TB SSD. £613 from www.snipca.com/41500

APPLE iPAD

Apple iPad 11
£329 from www.snipca.com/54887
Tested Issue 711

With a faster processor and increased storage (from 64GB to 128GB), the 2025 edition of the iPad is simply stunning. Battery life is over 11 hours, which is better than any other iPad, including more expensive models.

ALTERNATIVE iPad mini 7 The 2024 version of the mini improves the colour accuracy on the 8.3in screen and has a more powerful processor. £499 from www.snipca.com/52573

ANDROID TABLET

OnePlus Pad 3
£529 from www.snipca.com/55302
Tested Issue 714

With an incredibly fast processor and stunning 13.2in screen, this is the best ever Android tablet, and rivals the iPad Air. At launch both the 12GB RAM/256GB and 16GB/512GB versions were £529, so grab the latter as soon as possible.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 Has a much brighter screen than its predecessor, making it ideal for watching TV. Also has a faster processor, speeding up tasks. £584 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/50039

APPLE iPHONE

Apple iPhone 16
£699 from www.snipca.com/53981
Tested Issue 695

This is the best new iPhone for years, boosted by a processor that's as fast as much more expensive models. The screen is excellent, while the new Camera Control button gives lots of ways to take photos.

ALTERNATIVE iPhone 14 Now heavily discounted, this remains a speedy phone with great features and an impressive camera. £495 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/53982

ANDROID PHONE

PRICE DROP

Samsung Galaxy A56
£424 from www.snipca.com/54585
Tested Issue 709

The successor to Samsung's mid-range A55, this has a stunning screen and lasted over 29 hours in our tests. It's faster than Google's Pixel 7a in all tasks, and has AI-powered photo tools.

ALTERNATIVE Google Pixel 7a Cheaper version of Google's flagship phone, it uses AI to improve photos and lasts 10 hours. Has fast processor and 8GB RAM. £460 from www.snipca.com/56073

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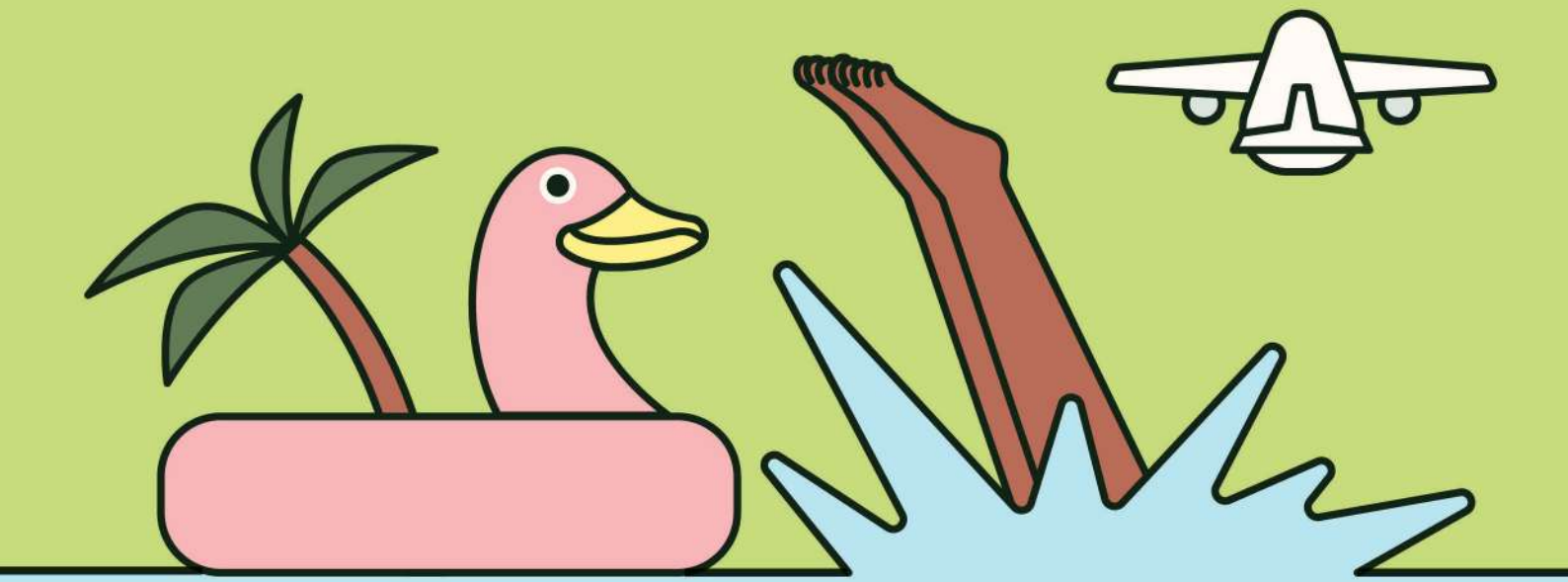


From city breaks to poolside relaxation,
scan here for cover that goes the distance.

Buy It

Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

MINI PC

GMKtec NucBox K11
£700 from www.snipca.com/54341
Tested Issue 707

A fast and powerful machine, but what really sets it apart are the ports letting you upgrade it – such as the OCuLink connection for graphics cards. Also has six USB ports, 32GB RAM (upgradeable to 96GB) and a 1TB SSD.

ALTERNATIVE Geekom A8 Too small to accommodate many ports, but makes up for it with a 2TB SSD and SD card slot for adding storage. £779 from www.snipca.com/55383

EBOOK READER

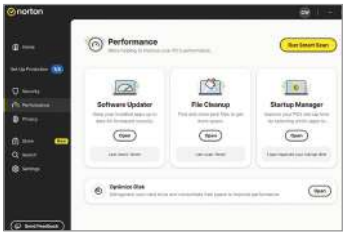
Amazon Kindle Paperwhite
£160 from www.snipca.com/52730
Tested Issue 698

The sixth version of the Paperwhite has a larger screen (7in), faster page turns and longer battery life (12 weeks – up from 10). Its glare-free finish means you can easily read it in bright sunlight, and its 300ppi resolution makes text a joy to read.

ALTERNATIVE Kobo Libra Kobo's first colour e-reader, with over 4,000 tones to make illustrations and photos leap out. £210 from www.snipca.com/50192

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Norton 360 Deluxe 2025
£14.99 from www.snipca.com/54797
Tested Issue 629



Norton has always performed strongly in our antivirus tests, regularly making the top three. Owned by US firm Gen Digital, it's available at a discount on our Software Store. Use the link above for a three-device, two-year licence at a special discount price. Other versions are available.

ALTERNATIVE Bitdefender Total Security Another top performer that we're offering at a discount. £24.99 from www.snipca.com/41141

WEBCAM

Obsbot Meet SE
£67 from www.snipca.com/54725
Tested Issue 710

The Meet SE from Chinese firm Obsbot beats the picture quality of our previous favourite, Logitech's C925e. Colours are vibrant and accurate, with terrific detail even in poor lighting thanks to a relatively wide aperture.

ALTERNATIVE Creative Live Cam Sync 4K Affordable 4K webcam with high-quality video that can also capture voice from a distance. £45 from www.snipca.com/56585

PC MONITOR

Philips 27E1N1600AE
£182 from www.snipca.com/54190
Tested Issue 692

An affordable 27in monitor with a sharp resolution, impressive image quality and a sturdy build. It has an HDMI port, a USB-C port and two USB 3.0. The hefty base means you can raise and tilt the monitor easily using just one hand.

ALTERNATIVE Asus ROG Strix XG27ACS Another excellent 27in monitor with 1440p resolution and a fast refresh rate aimed at gamers. £229 from www.snipca.com/49898

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Corsair MP600 Pro LPX 1TB
£84 from www.snipca.com/52658
Tested Issue 630

In our tests, this M.2 SSD hit speeds of 7,364MB/s and 6,870MB/s when reading and writing data – astonishingly fast scores. It's compatible with the new PCIe 4.0 standard, which is twice as fast as PCIe 3.0. The 1TB model costs £84; 2TB costs £170.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £85 from www.snipca.com/53808

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 2 Shokz OpenDots ONE headphones

Winner of a Recommended award in Issue 719 (page 28), the OpenDots ONE are Shokz's first clip-on style earbuds. Lightweight and compact, they offer up to 10 hours of rich, immersive audio in total comfort.

With a durable nickel-titanium plate combined with a soft silicone grip, the OpenDots ONE stay securely in place whatever you're doing. This innovative design ensures a comfortable, secure fit for every ear shape.

With 4 pre-set EQ modes, you can listen to your music, your way and Dolby Audio ensures you'll feel every note, every beat, every nuance.

DirectPitch Technology minimises sound leakage, so your music stays between you and your earbuds.

They last for up to 10 hours of listening off one charge, and a total of up to 40 hours with the included charging case. A quick 10-minute charge gives you up to two hours of listening.

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/56618 and submit your details by midnight Tuesday 18 November. Good luck!

You can buy Shokz OpenDots One headphones for £179 from John Lewis at www.snipca.com/56172. For more Shokz headphones visit https://uk.shokz.com.

PRINTER

HP OfficeJet Pro 9135e
£181 from www.snipca.com/53101
Tested Issue 700

A versatile cartridge printer-scanner for the home office that makes printing jobs quicker and easier than most of its inkjet rivals. Colour prints cost a reasonable 6p per page, while mono costs 2p. Printed text is superb and photos are pretty good too.

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-1810
Not the fastest printer, but comes with enough ink for 4,500 mono and 7,500 colour pages. £140 from www.snipca.com/52191

SMART TV

Bush 43UT24SB
£180 from www.snipca.com/53637
Tested Issue 703

It's rare to find a 43in TV this cheap, especially with a superbly bright screen. Sound isn't bad either, and it offers most of the streaming services, including Freely. Its TiVo operating system is very easy to use.

ALTERNATIVE Sharp GM6245K
Has a fantastic 43in screen with superb contrast, and 4K content looks especially detailed. Comes with TiVo for paid-for streaming and Freely for free live channels and catch-up. £230 from www.snipca.com/55940

ROUTER

PRICE DROP

TP-Link Archer BE550
£180 from www.snipca.com/55981
Tested Issue 718

This tri-band router is the first Wi-Fi 7 model to be our top choice. It had enough bandwidth across our test house to stream six 4K movies simultaneously, and has five 2.5Gbps Ethernet ports.

ALTERNATIVE Asus RT-AXE7800
Our previous favourite is also tri-band, but only on Wi-Fi 6E. That still delivers incredibly fast speeds that stretched deep into our test house. £180 from www.snipca.com/52957

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HOW TO...

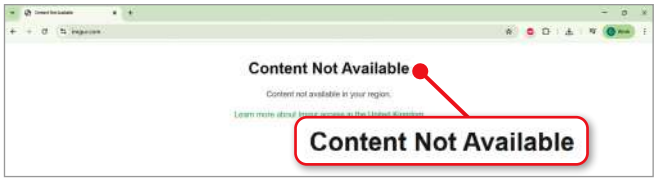
Upload your photos to share publicly

by Nik Rawlinson

What you need: Images to share **Time required:** 20 minutes

At the end of September, many forum users in the UK noticed blank spaces where images used to be. The missing pictures had been hosted on Imgur, a service that made it easy to share images without creating an account or paying for web space. You simply uploaded a picture, copied the link and then posted it in your forum message. However, people in the UK stopped seeing those images because Imgur introduced geofencing to block access for the whole country.

When a site uses geofencing, its servers check the IP address of the computer requesting data – such as an image – and decide whether or not to allow it. If the rules permit access only from a specific region, the server responds only to IPs registered there. Likewise, geofencing can stop data being served to certain regions. It's often used to block requests from known spam or malicious servers, although in this case it's to stop UK users accessing content ahead of possible action by a UK authority.



This is all you see when you visit Imgur's site in the UK

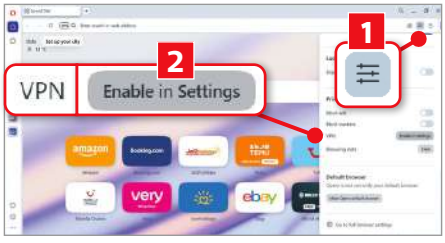
Imgur is owned by MediaLab AI, based in San Francisco. In September the UK's data watchdog, the Information Commissioners Office (ICO), told MediaLab AI that it intended to fine the company over how it checks the ages of users and what it does with children's data. MediaLab AI can appeal the ICO's decision, but in the meantime it has blocked its service to users in the UK.

Visit https://imgur.com and you'll see the message 'Content Not Available' (see screenshot above).

If you're thinking this doesn't affect you because you don't use Imgur, think again. The service has long been a popular way for people to post images online that they later embed in a social media or forum post. So even if you've never shared images this way, you've probably been viewing Imgur-hosted pictures without knowing it.

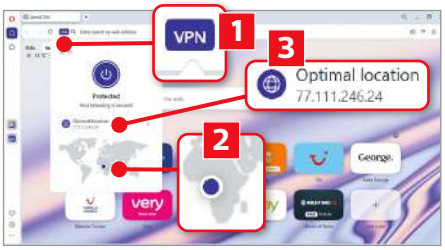
1 Use a VPN to get round the block

If you still want to see those pictures, one workaround is to use a VPN to make it appear as if you're browsing from a different country. Our favourite free VPN is ProtonVPN (www.protonvpn.com), while the best paid-for version is NordVPN (www.nordvpn.com). However, many browsers now have free built-in VPNs, including Opera (www.opera.com), which we'll use here. Open it, then click the three horizontal lines to the right of the address bar to open its Settings menu (1 in screenshot left). Click 'Enable in Settings' to the right of VPN 2.



Click 'Enable in Settings' next to VPN to turn on Opera's browser

When an alert appears warning you that your connection speed might be affected, click 'I understand'. You'll now



Opera is routing our internet traffic through a server in Africa, letting us access Imgur

see VPN in a box on the left of the address bar (1 in our screenshot above). Click this, then click the power button in the menu that appears. Opera will choose a location and connect you to a server in that country. In our example, Opera is routing our internet traffic through a server in Africa 2 so we should be able to access sites that are unavailable to UK users even if we're browsing from the UK.

If the VPN connects you through a server in the UK, any site that's blocked to UK users will continue to be unavailable. In this case you'll need to switch your virtual browsing location manually. To do this, click 'Optimal location' 3 and select either Americas or Asia to avoid any chance of the VPN connecting you to another UK-based server.

This isn't a perfect solution, because it means anyone in the UK who wants to see the images you upload to Imgur will also need to use a VPN. A better way around the problem is to upload your images to an alternative service. This applies even if you don't use forums but want an easy way to share pictures with others online. Thankfully, there are several alternatives, three of which we'll look at here. Imgbox and Postimages offer a no-fuss upload service, while Flickr provides more advanced features.

2 Upload your images to Imgbox

Imgbox (https://imgbox.com) is refreshingly easy to use. Simply drag an image you want to share from Windows File Explorer into the browser window. Imgbox will upload it and present you with a form, which you need to complete before it can make the image public. It works with JPEG, GIF and PNG images of 10MB or less. The service says it stores images for a "life time", and there are no limits, even if you don't register. However, it notes that you should always keep backups of your files.

Choose whether your images are family safe and set thumbnail dimensions

Once you've selected your files, click the menu beside content type and choose whether you are uploading 'family safe' or adult content (1 in our screenshot above). Now use the thumbnail menu to decide the size of the thumbnail (between 100 and 800 pixels square) 2. You can also choose between 'square' and 'resized' thumbnails, depending on where in the menu you choose the dimensions.

If you choose 'square', Imgbox will resize the image so its smallest dimension fills the specified area, even if the largest dimension exceeds it. Any parts of the image that don't fit within your specified dimensions will be cropped out – so you would lose the top and bottom portions of a portrait-orientation image, and the left and right edges of a landscape-orientation image.

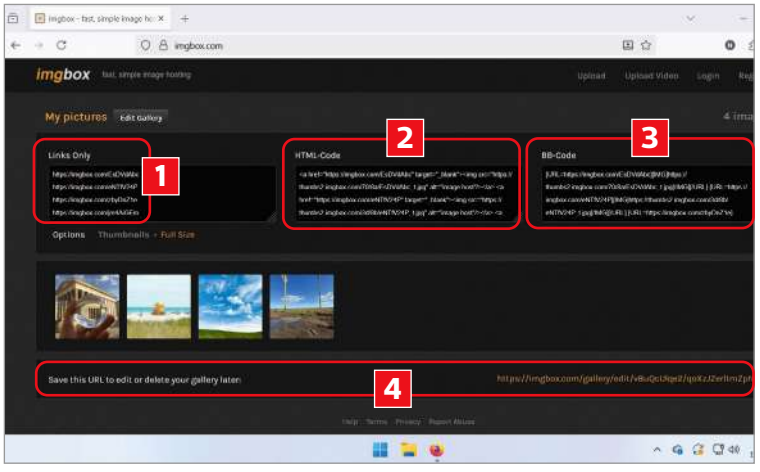
If you choose 'resized', Imgbox will shrink the image so its largest dimension fits within the specified area instead. As this means the smallest dimension will also fit, nothing will be cropped away.

Next, decide whether or not you want to let viewers comment on your images 3. Then, from the Gallery Option menu, specify whether you want it to create a gallery, which may be a good option if you're uploading multiple images 4. If you do, enter a name for the gallery in the box under this menu, then click Add More 5 and choose which other images you want in the gallery.

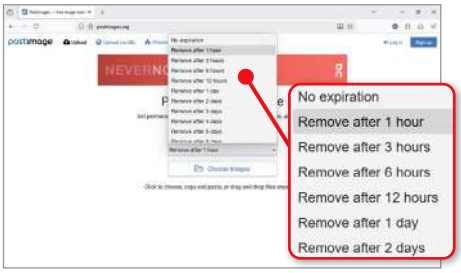
When you've finished, click 'Start upload' 6 and Imgbox will upload the images to its servers. Uploading four images of around 3MB apiece over our fibre broadband connection took less than 30 seconds.

Once your pictures have uploaded, you will see an information screen showing the links you can use to share the images with others. The addresses in the Links Only box (1 in our screenshot below) directly load each image. However, there are two other interesting options, which are the HTML-code 2 and BB-code boxes 3.

HTML code embeds images in a webpage if you want to use the Imgbox-hosted pictures on a website you're building. You can sometimes use these codes in forum posts, too, though many use what's known as BB code instead – these are displayed in the third box. Note that there is a 'delete' link at the bottom 4 – save this somewhere in case you need to delete images.



Imgbox gives you links for your images and HTML code for embedding them into websites



You can specify when your images should disappear with Postimage

How I share images

On the rare occasions I've needed to share images in an ad-hoc manner, I've usually used Imgur, so I'll have to use one of the alternatives we've explored here for the time being. Thankfully, most of my image sharing is work-based, which means I share collections of screen grabs and other pictures, rather than one-off shots. For these I tend to use traditional online storage.

Nik Rawlinson

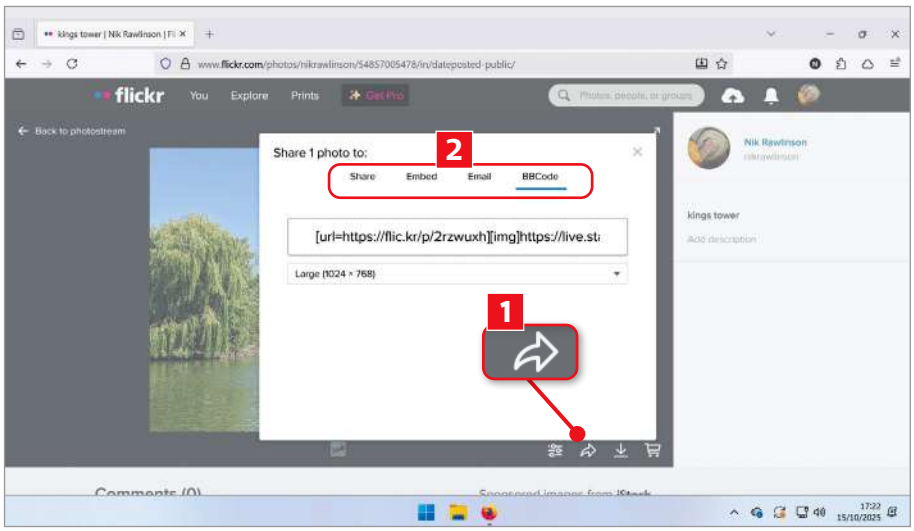
How do you share images online? Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

3 Upload your images to Postimages

Postimages (https://postimages.org) is a similar service to Imgbox. However, while Imgbox hosts your images for life by default, you can set your uploads in Postimage to expire between one hour and one year after you upload them (see screenshot above).

Postimages offers both free and premium accounts. If you use a free account, anything you upload is downscaled to 1280 pixels in the widest dimension, and files must be no larger than 32MB. Neither restriction should pose a problem if you're uploading images to share on forums. If you pay for a premium account, which starts at $14.99 a month (about £11.14), you can link to images at their original resolution, and the maximum file size increases to 64MB.

Visit Postimages and, in the first menu, select whether your uploads should be resized. The second menu lets you choose when they should expire. Now click 'Choose images' and in File Explorer select the image you want to share. It will be uploaded instantly, and a table of nine different linking methods will appear, including HTML (1 in our screenshot below), forum codes 2 and direct links 3. The last link is the removal link 4. Keep a note of this if you set your images not to expire, or if you think you might want to delete them before the expiry time is reached.



Flickr is a fully featured photo storage service that also lets you embed your images elsewhere

4 Upload your images to Flickr

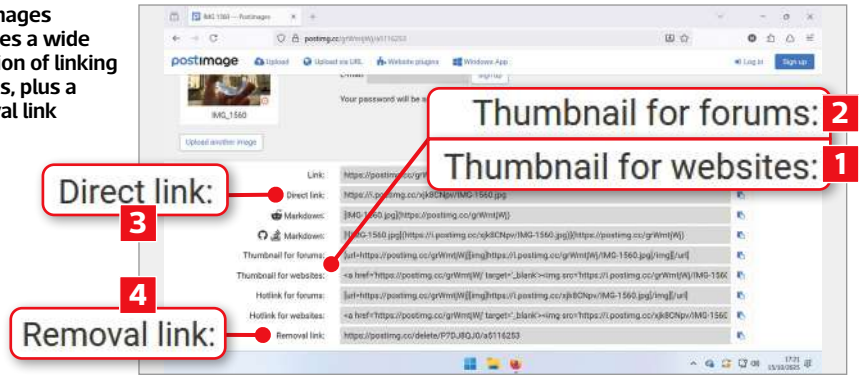
Flickr (www.flickr.com) was founded in 2004 as a traditional image-sharing website. For the past 20 years or so, users have reportedly uploaded several billion photos to the service, either for viewing on Flickr itself or embedding on other sites.

Like Postimages, Flickr has options for both free and paid accounts. Free-account holders can upload a maximum of 1,000 photos, only 50 of which can be private. A Pro account costs £9 a month, £74 a year or £124 for two years, and allows unlimited photos, of which as many as you want can be private. Pro users also won't see ads.

If you're only using the service to host images you want to share on forums or with friends and family, rather than as a way to keep a permanent photo library, the 1,000-image cap may be enough, especially if you get into the habit of removing old photos.

To link to an image you've uploaded to Flickr, click the arrow icon beneath it (1 in our screenshot above). This shows options for Share, Embed, Email and BBCode 2. Copy the address on the Share tab if you want to post it to social media. Switch to Embed if you want the HTML code you'll need to embed it on a website you're designing, and use the code on the BBCode tab to post it to a forum.

The Email tab doesn't provide a code, but there are boxes for an email address and message. Fill in each of these, then click Share and Flickr will send the recipient a thumbnail of the image and a link to the original.



Postimages provides a wide selection of linking options, plus a removal link

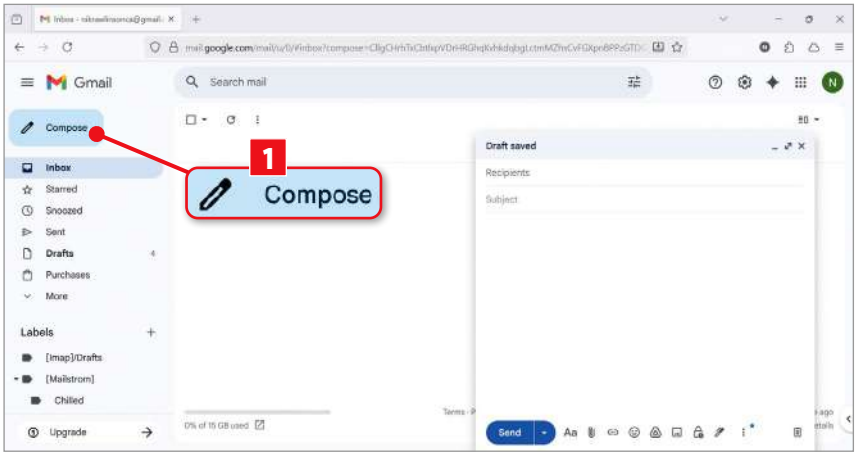
Use webmail to record your notes and reminders

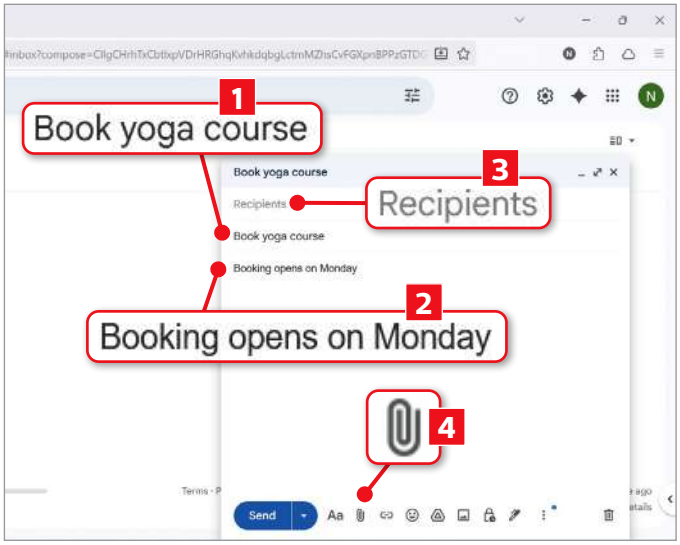
What you need: Gmail or other webmail account
Time required: 20 minutes

Instead of using an app or program to take notes, try the drafts feature in your webmail service. That way, your reminders and notes are accessible whether you're sitting at your computer, out and about with your phone, or logging in through a friend's browser. It's a beautifully simple solution – and it's free. We'll show you how to get started using Gmail (www.gmail.com) but the principle is the same in other webmail services, including Outlook/Hotmail.

STEP 1

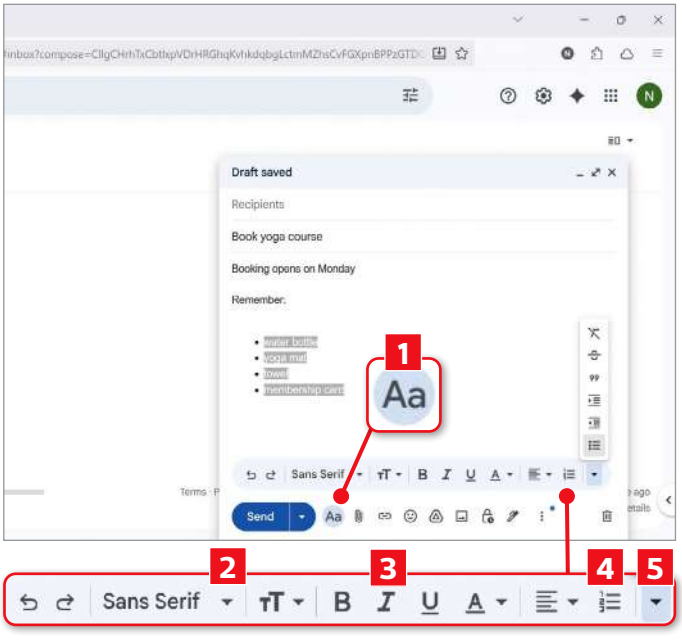
Open Gmail and click Compose 1. If you're using the Gmail app rather than the browser, the button floats at the bottom of the window. You can also achieve the same thing using the iPhone/iPad's default Mail app by tapping the new message icon (pen in a square) at the top right (iPad) or bottom right (iPhone) of the screen. If your Gmail address isn't shown in the From line, tap that line and select your Gmail account from the menu that pops up.





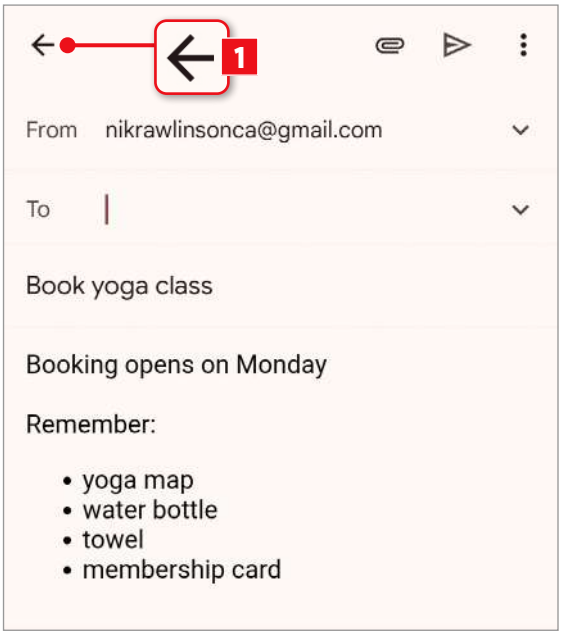
STEP 2

Use the Subject line 1 to give the note a meaningful title, then type the note into the body of the email 2. You can leave the Recipients line 3 blank as you won't actually be sending the message to anyone. The best thing about creating reminders, notes and tasks this way is that you can attach any supporting documents, photos or other files, by clicking the attachments icon 4. This lets you keep everything you may need to refer to in one place.

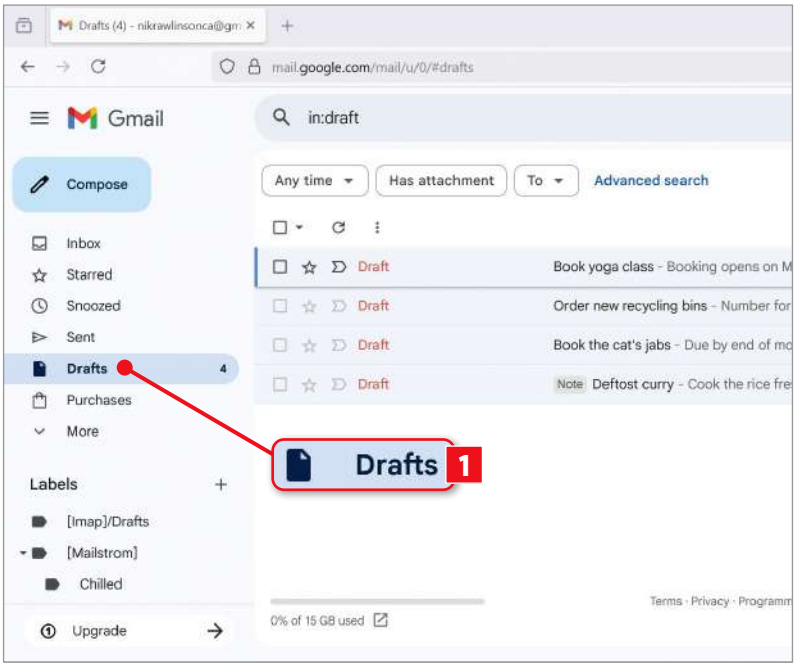


STEP 3

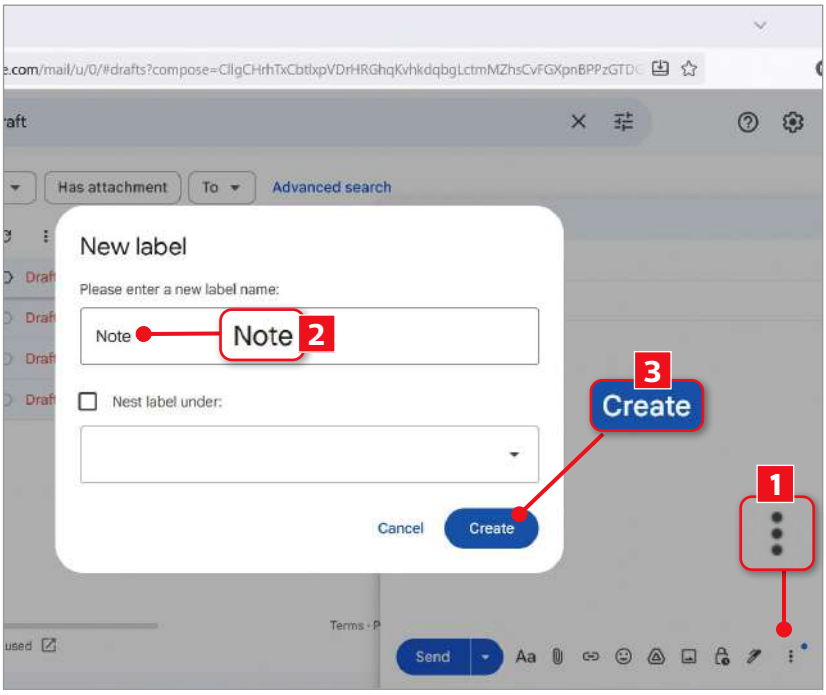
If you want to emphasise any part of the note, click the Formatting icon 1 to reveal the formatting toolbar 2. Here, you'll find controls for bold, italic and underline 3, as well as numbered and bulleted lists 4. Click the down-pointing arrow 5 to reveal more formatting options.



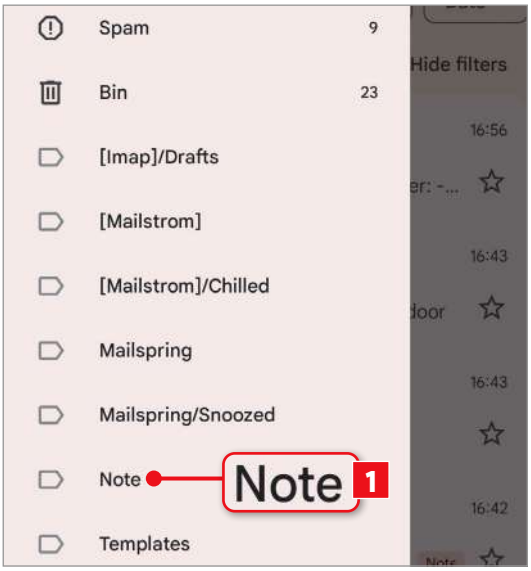
STEP 4 When you've finished typing your note, click the close button (x) and it will be saved in the Drafts folder. If you're using the Android Gmail app, tap the left-pointing arrow 1 instead. If you're using the iPhone or iPad's default Mail app, when you tap the 'x' at the top of the app window it will ask if you want to Delete Draft or Save Draft. Tap 'Save Draft'.



STEP 5 Now, when you want to find a synchronised notes you've made, in the browser version of Gmail tap the Drafts folder 1 on the left-hand sidebar. You can find this on the iPhone/iPad Mail app by tapping the left-pointing arrow in the top left of your inbox. This takes you back to Mailboxes, then scroll down to Gmail and tap Drafts. On Android, tap the three lines on the left of the search box at the top of the screen, followed by Drafts.



STEP 6 You'll notice that all your notes appear alongside any other draft messages you've created, which can become cluttered over time. If you're using Gmail in your browser, you can apply labels to your notes to make them easier to sort. Open the message and click the three dots bottom right 1, hover over Label, click 'Create new' and call it Note 2, then click Create 3. You can't add labels to unsent notes in the Gmail app or the iPhone/iPad Mail app.



STEP 7 Now, when you want to find your draft notes separate from draft emails, click Note in the Gmail sidebar or, in the Gmail app, tap the three lines in the search box at the top of the message list, then tap Note 1 on the menu that appears. You'll notice in our Step 6 screenshot the option to 'Nest label under'. If you want to create sub-categories, like notes for home, office or weekend, you can type these in the 'Please enter a new label name' field, then choose Note in the 'Nest label under' menu.

Readers' Tips

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Change skip times in podcasts

Pocket Casts' online player (www.snipca.com/56647) deserved its place in Issue 721's Cover Feature on stuff that's now free (page 50). But one thing that flummoxed me for several weeks was how to change the duration times when you skip forward and back. By default these are set at 45 seconds forward and 10 seconds back, which are too short for my liking.

To tweak these, click the top-right profile icon (1 in our screenshot) then Settings 2. Now type the durations you want in the boxes – I've gone for 120 seconds forward and 30 seconds back 3. When you've made the change the new figures will appear in your playback controls at the bottom left 4.

I also like the Intelligent Playback Resumption option 5 which resumes episodes a little back from where you left off. This nicely eases you back into an episode.

Mike Sachs

Mike wins a copy of our 2024 Back Issue CD | **Buy it from us at www.snipca.com/53433**

SOFTWARE

Rename masses of files in one go

In Issue 719's Problems Solved (page 67), you suggest using Microsoft PowerToys (www.snipca.com/55899) to rename hundreds of file names in one go. A simpler solution is Winsome File Renamer (https://filerenamer.net), which I've been using for years. It costs $19.95 (about £15) for one Windows computer and comes with many options including Live Preview (1 in our screenshot below left) and Undo 2.

Recently, I found almost 2,000 JPEG files in 60 folders on my computer. I selected them all then dragged them to the files window 3 in File Renamer, where I could rename them quickly and easily. It's simply a brilliant product.

Ian Thow

DESKTOP

Stop games adding shortcuts

I've rediscovered the pleasure of playing games on my PC after downloading Google Play Games (www.snipca.com/56404, Issue 720, page 18).

I love trying the different flight simulators, but one thing I recommend when installing a game is to make sure the game doesn't add a shortcut to launch it from your desktop. This option appears when you click Install – just select 'Don't add' (1 in our screenshot above right) and tick 'Remember for future games' 2 so you don't have to do this every time. My desktop is messy enough without shortcuts for games cluttering it!

Kevin McNamara

PASSWORDS

Store KeePass database on your home network

I use KeePass (www.keepass.info), one of the password managers that didn't make the cut in Issue 720's Cover Feature. When I started to use KeePass it annoyed me that it didn't store your passwords online. This makes sharing

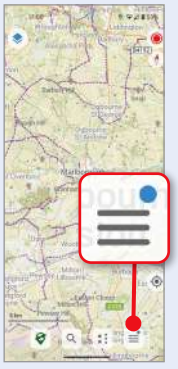
Why I stopped using...

Google Maps

There's no single reason why I abandoned Google Maps beyond a general drift away from Google's products because of the endless adverts and gathering of personal data. I had already switched from Gmail and Google Drive (to Proton Mail and Drive respectively).

And what I use instead...

I hadn't thought about using an alternative to Google Maps on my OnePlus Android phone until I read about **Organic Maps** (https://organicmaps.app) in Issue 720 (page 44).



You mentioned that the latest update adds bus routes, and showing whether there's a bench or shelter shows an impressive attention to detail.

I've not seen a single advert nor been pestered by any nags to upgrade. My only gripe is by default the text for place names is a little small. I found a way to change this in Settings. Tap the three horizontal lines (see screenshot) then Settings and turn on the slider 'Increase size for map labels'.

Graham Hodge

Tell us why you stopped using a website, app or program: letters@computeractive.co.uk

your database with your devices more difficult. However, I'm now glad I stayed with KeePass for that very reason. It means I don't have to worry about my password manager being hacked.

What I've done is store my KeePass database on a networked drive and blocked anyone from outside my home network accessing it. I keep my various PCs up to date using SyncBackFree (www.snipca.com/56645, pictured above). Storing the database this way means I can update it from any of my devices when at home and sync it with my other PCs. I use a similar app for my Android devices.

You can also do this by connecting an external drive to the USB socket of your router, if it has one.

Fraser Drummond

Reader recommends...

Obsbot Meet SE webcam

£79 from Amazon www.snipca.com/54725

My family in Australia had been urging me to buy a decent webcam to improve the quality of our weekly video chats. I therefore made a note of your five-star review of the Obsbot Meet SE in Issue 710 (page 26), and saw that it was good enough to become your Buy It! webcam (see page 32).

I snapped it up for £67 a few weeks after your review, £12 cheaper than the full price. It has proved a bargain. My family couldn't believe the difference it made. They said they could see me in more detail than ever before, though I'm somewhat past my prime so I wasn't sure whether to be pleased about this! I impressed them more when I used Obsbot's tool for zooming into part of my screen.

The purchase has changed my family's perception of me. They used to think I was a bit of a luddite. But now they take my purchase recommendations seriously. About time!

Robin Jones

Want to recommend hardware or software to fellow readers?
Email letters@computeractive.co.uk

DESKTOP

Show just recycle bin and link to Shortcuts folder

In Issue 719's Readers' Tips Graham Dragon explained how he keeps his desktop organised by having only the recycle bin and two folders ('Occasional Access Files' and 'Frequent Access Files') on it. I have an even cleaner desktop, just sporting the recycle bin (1 in our screenshot below). On the taskbar I have a link to File Explorer 2, which contains a folder called Shortcuts that has links to all the files I need to access regularly. Another useful tip is to have a temporary folder (mine is called Temp) where I save files I'm not going to need more than once. You can clear this regularly to stop the build-up of unwanted files.

Andy Hunt

USB

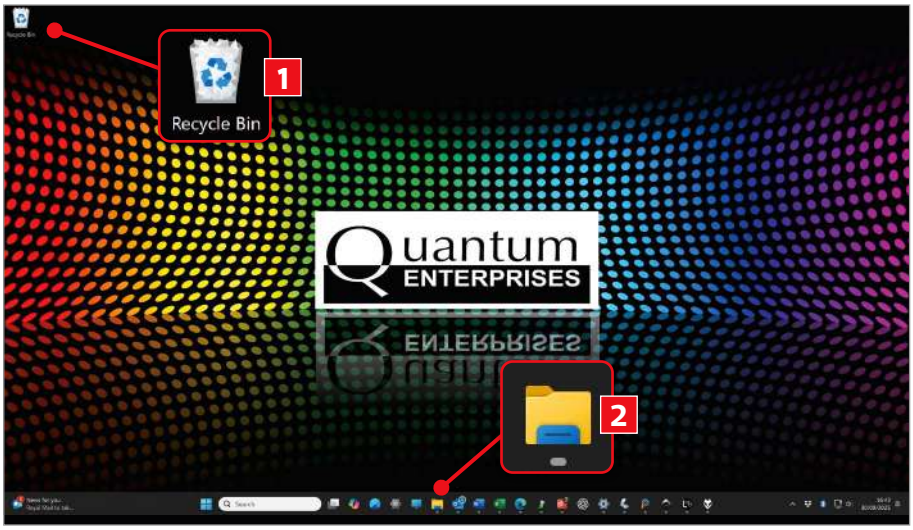
Attach sticks to key rings

In Issue 719's Letters Rod Grover asks for ideas on labelling USB sticks. I've been attaching keyring tags to the hole that exists on most sticks (pictured below). You can order them from Amazon in packs of 10 for just over £7 (www.snipca.com/56643).

Ken Ford

A simple solution is to give each USB stick a single-digit label ('A', for example) and keep a file elsewhere containing the contents of each. Using the numbers 0 to 9 and letters A to Z will give labelling options for 10 plus 26, which equals 36 drives. Two-character IDs would allow for 36 squared, which is 1,296 options!

Alan Thomas



PRINTING

Print Quicken files as PDFs

In Issue 720 (page 66) Jim Winnett wanted to know how he can print from his old Quicken tool, which he has moved from Windows XP to 11. I've been using Quicken since the 1980s and still use the last UK version, released in 2004.

Without knowing the exact problem Jim has, may I suggest the following option which has been working for me in Windows 10 and now in Windows 11. It's ideal for printing the Quicken reports. Within Quicken select File then Printer Setup followed by 'For Reports and Graphs'. Now select 'Microsoft Print to PDF' (or similar PDF printer installed) and click OK.

When printing reports it will be saved as a PDF that's easily read on a PC, tablet or smartphone. On my PC I save the file in a Google Drive folder which can then be opened and printed, or read on my mobile devices using the Google Drive app. It also works with Dropbox.

Nigel O'Coffey

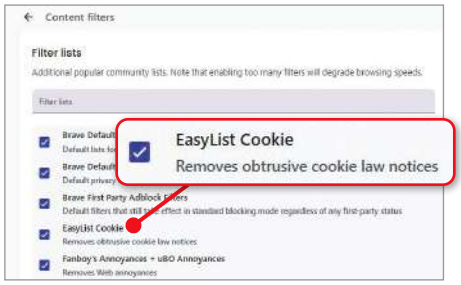
BRAVE

Choose the correct ad-blocking filters

Like AdGuard – see our Workshop in Issue 721 (page 38) – Brave lets you block more ads and other online annoyances by enabling extra filter lists. These boost the protection offered by its Shields feature, provided you know which filters to use.

Version 1.83 of the browser, released in early October, makes things easier by providing descriptions of its filter lists – rather than just their names. To view them, click Brave's three-line menu button and select Settings then Shields, followed by 'Content filtering'.

In the 'Filter lists' section, you'll now see descriptions of all available filters, such as 'EasyList Cookie – Removes obtrusive cookie law notices' (see screenshot below). Select the filter lists you want to use and they'll be added to Brave Shields.



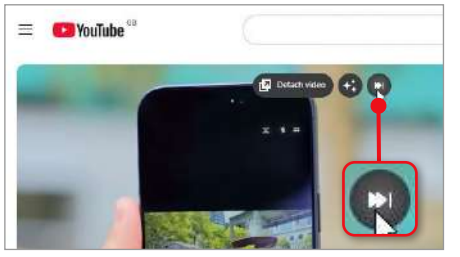
OPERA

Skip videos and ads on YouTube

Opera 122, released in October, introduces a handy Video Skip option. This jumps straight to the end of the YouTube video you're watching, so you can move on to the next clip in the channel or playlist – or a related video if you have Autoplay enabled.

That may not sound particularly exciting, but the feature also has the benefit of skipping video ads, without waiting for the Skip button to appear. Simply hover your cursor and click the new Video Skip button (see screenshot below).

Opera says Video Skip complements its built-in ad blocker, and doesn't require that feature to be turned on. However, it's still an experiment so it may not always work.



FIREFOX

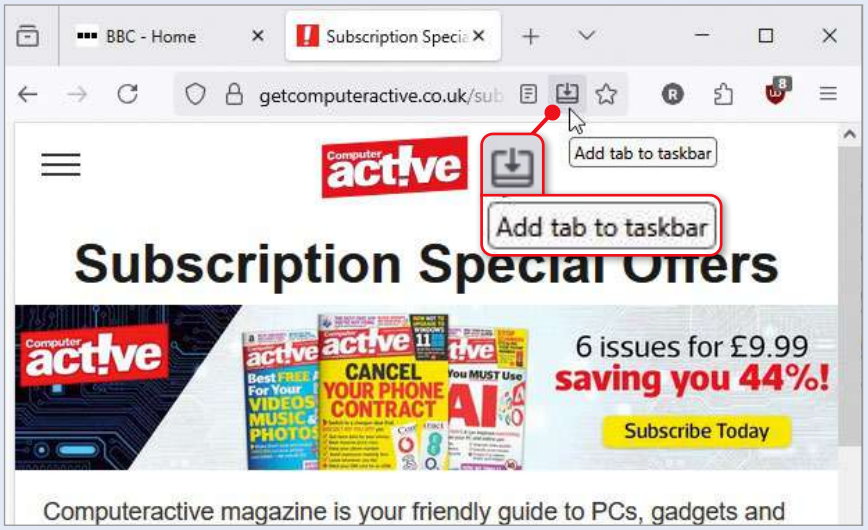
Turn any website into a web app

Firefox 143 (released in September) finally adds support for progressive web apps (PWAs), a feature long available in Chromium browsers such as Chrome, Edge and Brave. This lets you open websites in simplified windows you can pin to and run from the Windows taskbar – ie, outside of the main browser.

Unlike Chromium browsers, Firefox can turn any website into a web app, not just those that support PWAs. Mozilla doesn't use the term 'PWA', but the feature works in a similar way.

Click the new 'Add tab to taskbar' icon at the end of the Firefox address bar – this looks like a down arrow above a desktop (see screenshot) – to convert the current site into a web app. This displays the site in a new window, without the browser's toolbars and other clutter.

It also creates a taskbar shortcut you can use to access the site even when Firefox is closed. To remove this shortcut, right-click it and choose 'Unpin from taskbar'.



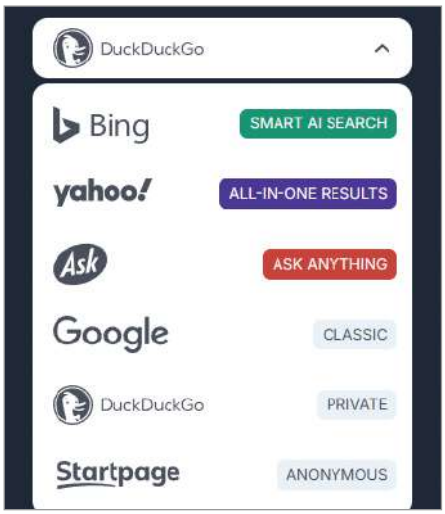
CHROMIUM

Switch between search engines

Unlike Firefox, Chromium browsers don't let you switch between different search engines without going into their settings and changing the default search provider. A new extension called Snappi (www.snipca.com/56419) fixes this problem by letting you instantly switch between search engines.

Click its toolbar button to choose from options including Google, Bing and DuckDuckGo (see screenshot above right), as well as Ask, which is surprisingly still going. Type a query into your address bar and your browser will use your new search provider.

When you install Snappi in Chrome, you may get an Enhance Safe Browsing warning, but just click 'Continue to install'. Snappi is safe to use, though requires permission to change your search settings. Click 'Keep it' if Google warns about that too.



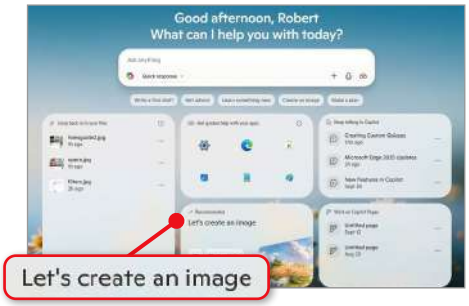
COPILOT

Discover the new 'home experience'

Microsoft has redesigned the Copilot app for Windows 11 to provide a new 'home experience'. This resembles a personalised start page, with various modules and a photo background.

The modules include 'Jump back into your files', which displays your recent files so you can ask Copilot to summarise or look up information about them. The 'Get guided help with your apps' module lets you select a Windows app, such as Settings, Edge or Paint, then share your screen using Copilot Vision to get help using it.

The new home screen includes buttons for creating different types of image (see screenshot below) – for example, photorealistic or watercolour. There's also a module showing your recent chat history, so you can resume a conversation with Copilot.

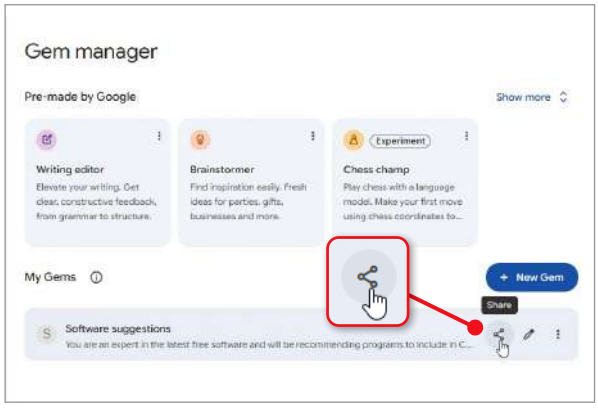


GEMINI

Share your Gems with other people

Gemini's Gems feature lets you create personalised chatbots for performing specific tasks – similar to custom GPTs in ChatGPT. It's now possible to share your 'gems' with friends, family and colleagues, to serve as a communal resource for obtaining and generating relevant content.

To do so, click Explore Gems in the left-hand menu of the Gemini website. In the My Gems section, click the Share button next to the name of the gem (see screenshot below), and enter the name or email address of the person you want to share it with. Choose whether to make them a Viewer or an Editor, then click Send. Your gem will then be added to their Gemini account.

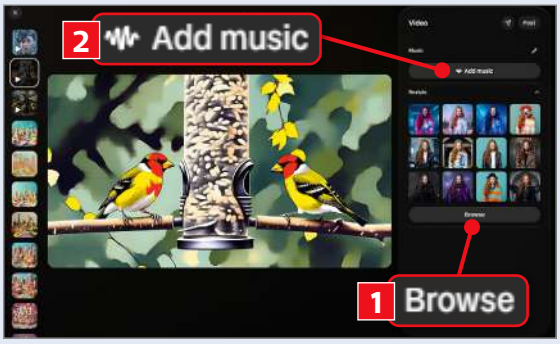


We explained how to use Gemini Gems in our Easy When You Know How section in Issue 712 (page 74).

META AI

Transform videos using the new Restyle tool

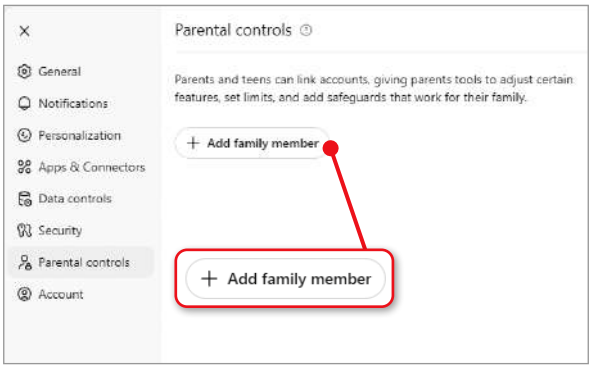
Meta AI's new Vibes feed (www.snipca.com/56533), which lets you create, remix and share AI videos in its mobile app, isn't yet available in the UK. But it has finally added video editing to its web version (www.meta.ai), four months after it launched in the US.



This lets you 'restyle' clips of up to 10 seconds in length using dozens of fun and artistic filters. These change the location, outfit and even the species of the subject of your video, with options including 1800s, Starship and Illustration (pictured).

To get started, click the plus-sign button below the message box, choose 'Add media' and upload a video. If it's longer than 10 seconds, you can trim it to the desired segment. Click 'Browse' in the panel on the right (1 in our screenshot) to explore the full range of filters, then select one and click Restyle.

Meta AI will apply the filter to your clip – this takes a few minutes – and let you download and share the result. The restyled videos are of excellent quality and you can also add music 2.



CHATGPT

Set up parental controls

As we reported in Issue 720 (page 9), OpenAI now allows parents to link their ChatGPT accounts with those of their teenage children (minimum age 13). This protects young users from unsuitable content and limits which ChatGPT features they can use.

To set up parental controls, click your username in the bottom-left corner of the ChatGPT website (the feature isn't yet available in the mobile apps) and choose Settings, then 'Parental controls'. Click 'Add family member' (see screenshot above) to invite your teenage child to connect their ChatGPT account.

Once they accept, you can manage their account settings, by – for example – setting quiet times when ChatGPT can't be used, turning off voice mode and disabling image generation. You can't read their chats, but ChatGPT will notify you if it detects signs of "serious safety risk".

Phone and Tablet Tips

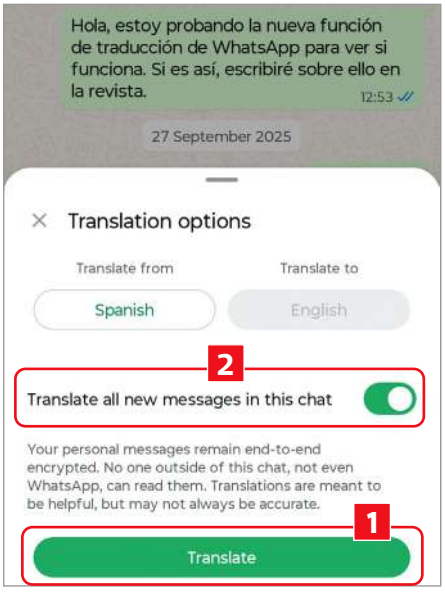
ANDROID & iOS

Translate foreign-language messages in WhatsApp

WhatsApp can now translate messages you receive in certain foreign languages. This saves you copying the text to a translation app such as Google Translate to find out what it means.

The translation feature works with messages in both individual and group chats. In WhatsApp for Android, you can currently translate six languages – including Spanish, Hindi and Portuguese – while the iOS app supports 19.

To try the new option, long-press a foreign language message, then tap the three-dot menu icon and select Translate.


Hola, estoy probando la nueva función de traducción de WhatsApp para ver si funciona. Si es así, escribiré sobre ello en la revista.
12:53
27 September 2025
Translation options
Translate from
Translate to
Spanish
English
2
Translate all new messages in this chat
Your personal messages remain end-to-end encrypted. No one outside of this chat, not even WhatsApp, can read them. Translations are meant to be helpful, but may not always be accurate.
1
Translate

Tap 'Choose' and download the relevant language pack – you only need to do this the first time you translate that language.

Press 'Continue' then Translate (1 in our screenshot below left) – the Android app has an additional option for translating all new messages in the chat 2. WhatsApp will replace the foreign text with its English translation and mark it as 'Translated'.

To revert to the original language, long-press the message, tap the three-dot menu icon and choose 'Remove translation'.

ANDROID & iOS

Simplify web pages with Vivaldi's Reader View

Vivaldi has updated its browser for Android (www.snipca.com/56622) and iOS (www.snipca.com/56623), and – as usual – each app has different additions. The big new feature in the iOS version is Reader View, which is already available on Android.

This makes web pages easier to read by removing all the clutter to focus on the text and main images. Just tap the Reader View icon in the address bar (see screenshot above) when viewing long passages of text such as a news story or blog post, to simplify the article. In Vivaldi for iOS, you can customise Reader View's colour, brightness, font style and text size – hopefully those options will come to Android soon.

tomsguide.com
Windows 10 support ends tomorrow: LIVE updates on security risks, upgrade options and what to do now
Looking to upgrade to Windows 11?

In the meantime, Vivaldi's Android users can try the browser's new feature for organising bookmarks into folders. When you add a page as a bookmark, by tapping the 'V' menu and choosing 'Add Page to' then Bookmarks, you can now specify a folder to save it in.

Press the Bookmarks link to open the 'Edit bookmark' screen, select the default bookmarks location and tap New Bookmark Folder. Name the folder and tap the tick icon. Future bookmarks will be saved to this folder unless you choose a different location.

ANDROID & iOS

Exclude songs from Spotify recommendations

Spotify has introduced the useful option to exclude specific songs from your 'taste profile'. This prevents the service from including those tracks in automatically generated playlists and using them as the basis for its recommendations of similar music.

When you're playing a song you don't

BEST NEW APPS

What you should install this fortnight

Opera

Free

Android www.snipca.com/56633
iOS www.snipca.com/56634

Opera has brought 'advanced' tab management to its iOS browser, two months after it added it to Android. This lets you view your open tabs in a list or grid, easily sort them into groups and – in the iPad version – create 'tab islands' (customisable strips of tabs). You can also search the titles of tabs to find the page you want.

FreeStuffSpot

Free

Android www.snipca.com/56632

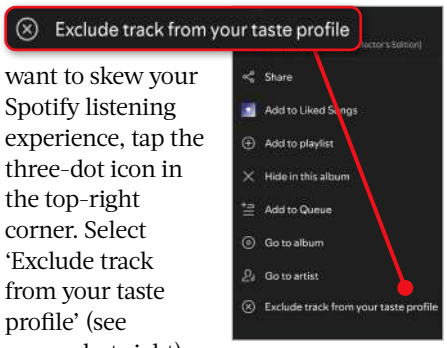
This new app from the website of the same name rounds up the latest free samples, giveaways and competitions from reputable brands. Unusually for such apps, it's not stuffed with ads, though some promotions involve completing surveys. At the time of writing, the freebies included toothpaste, cat food and 2026 calendars.

Scream TV

Free

Android www.snipca.com/56635
iOS www.snipca.com/56636

Watch hundreds of horror films for free on Scream TV's new app. Browse categories including Monster, Supernatural and Psychological, to play an eclectic mix of movies. These include classics such as *Peeping Tom* and *The Stepford Wives*, and recent, gorier fare. You can also watch Scream TV on Freeview on channel 271.



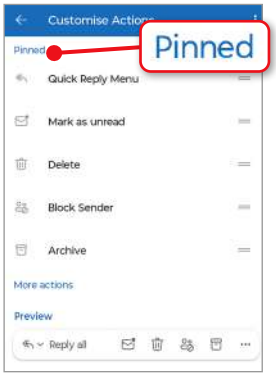
want to skew your Spotify listening experience, tap the three-dot icon in the top-right corner. Select 'Exclude track from your taste profile' (see screenshot right) – you can still enjoy it in the moment, but it won't influence future recommendations. The new option is available to both Free and Premium users across Spotify's mobile, desktop and web apps.

ANDROID & iOS

Customise Outlook's actions toolbar

Microsoft has made a welcome improvement to its Outlook app for Android (www.snipca.com/56626) and iOS (www.snipca.com/56627). It has moved the actions toolbar, which contains shortcuts for replying to and deleting emails, as well as marking them as unread, to a more convenient position at the bottom of the screen.

What's more, you can now customise the toolbar to include other actions of your choice. Tap the three-dot icon and choose Reorder then drag the shortcuts you want to add to the Pinned section of the list (see screenshot left). Options include Snooze, Block Sender and Forward. You can remove existing actions to avoid the toolbar becoming overcrowded.



iOS

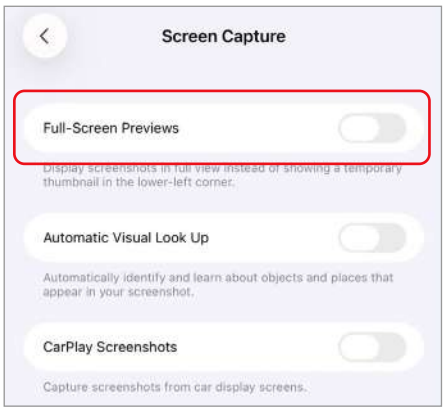
Disable full-screen previews for screenshots

One of the most notable changes in iOS and iPadOS 26 is to the built-in screenshot feature. Previously, when you took a screenshot on your iPhone or iPad, the captured image appeared as a thumbnail in the corner of your screen.

This disappeared after a few seconds, with the screenshot automatically saved to the Photos app. In iOS/iPadOS 26, the shot is displayed as a full-screen preview, which you can edit and annotate before manually saving it.

On devices that support Apple's Visual Intelligence feature, which is part of the broader Apple Intelligence AI system, these full-screen previews let you analyse the content of your screenshots and look up information about specific elements. But many iPhone and iPad users prefer the old, less obtrusive way of previewing screenshots, and find the change more annoying than useful.

Thankfully, it's possible to disable full-screen previews and return to the previous method. To do so, open the Settings app and tap General then Screen Capture. Switch off the option Full-Screen Previews (see screenshot above) and they won't bother you again.


Screen Capture
Full-Screen Previews
Display screenshots in full view instead of showing a temporary thumbnail in the lower-left corner.
Automatic Visual Look Up
Automatically identify and learn about objects and places that appear in your screenshot.
CarPlay Screenshots
Capture screenshots from car display screens.

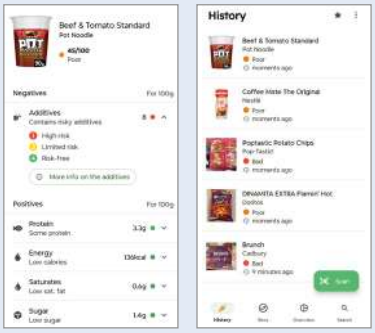
BEST APPS FOR... Snack lovers

Yuka

Free*
Android www.snipca.com/56637
iOS www.snipca.com/56638

Yuka helps you find healthier snacks. It scans the barcodes of food products to summarise their negative effects on your health – such as containing lots of additives, sugar and saturates – and their positive impact, including the amount of protein and fibre. It then recommends more nutritious alternatives.

Best For Avoiding unhealthy snacks

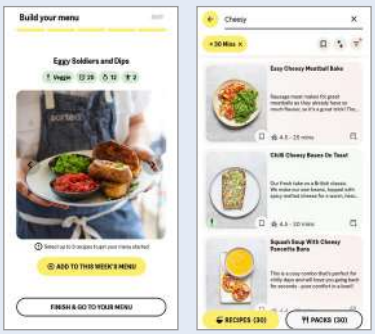


Sidekick

Free*
Android www.snipca.com/56639
iOS www.snipca.com/56640

If you prefer to prepare your own snacks, Sidekick offers loads of simple, tasty recipes, based on the ingredients and time you have available, and your preferred cuisines – including British. Add three quick meals to your weekly plan to create a shopping list and see the equipment you'll need to make them. Pay £6 a month to unlock all recipes.

Best For Creating your own snacks

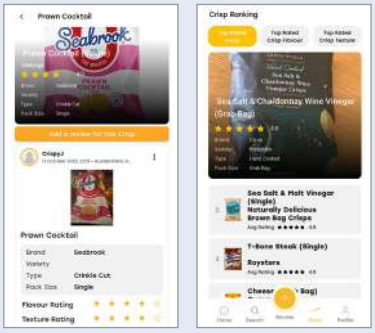


Eat Crisps

Free
Android www.snipca.com/56641
iOS www.snipca.com/56642

This new app for crisp lovers invites you to share your favourite brands and varieties, and rate them for flavour and texture. Browse a feed of other users' choices to discover new crisps from around the UK and read their reviews. The Eat Crisps leaderboard is currently topped by the Co-op's Sea Salt & Chardonnay Wine Vinegar.

Best For Crisp connoisseurs

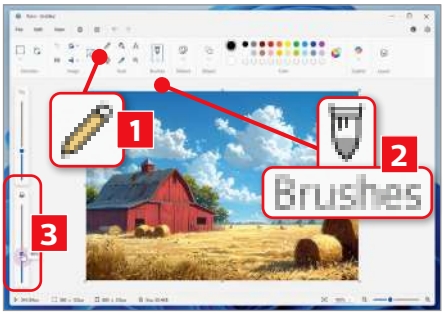


*Contains in-app purchases

WINDOWS 11

Use the opacity slider in Microsoft Paint

Microsoft has added an opacity slider to Paint, letting you change the transparency of strokes made with the Pencil (1 in our screenshot below) and Brush 2 tools. Click either and the opacity slider appears on the left side of the canvas 3. The slider above it is Size, for changing the width of the brush/pencil stroke.



WINDOWS 10 & 11

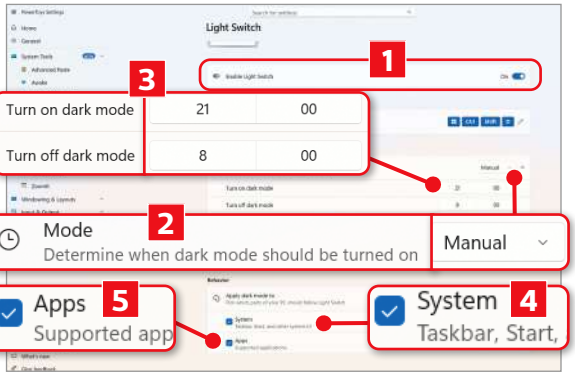
Set start and end times for light and dark mode

PowerToys 0.95, released on 15 October, adds the Light Switch tool for automatically switching your computer between light and dark mode.

Launch PowerToys then click System Tools in the menu on the left, followed by Light Switch. Make sure the 'Enable Light Switch' slider is on (1 in our screenshot below), then leave Manual selected in the Mode dropdown menu 2 and set times for dark mode to be turned on and off 3. Alternatively, switch Manual to 'Sunset to sunrise' and it'll activate dark mode when the sun sets, automatically changing the time throughout the winter and beyond.

You can also choose whether Light Switch will apply to your whole system (including taskbar and Start menu) 4 or only programs that support it 5.

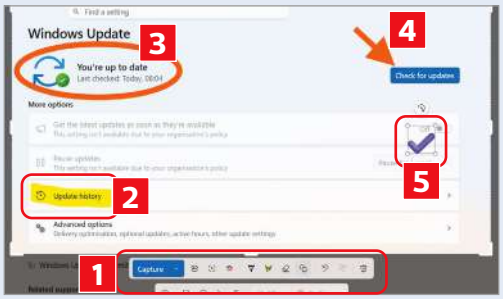
If you've already got PowerToys installed, you'll be prompted to update to version 0.95 when you next open it. If you don't have it installed, download it from www.snipca.com/56718.



WINDOWS 11

Annotate screenshots before saving

You can now edit and annotate screenshots taken in Snipping Tool *before* saving them. Press Windows key+Shift+S to open Snipping Tool, then click the 'Quick mark-up' icon at the top so it turns blue (see screenshot below). If you don't see this, press Ctrl+E. Now drag your cursor as usual to set the screenshot area and a row of editing options will appear at the bottom (1 in our screenshot above right), including shapes (which also contains emojis) and pens (ballpoint and highlighter).



You can change their thickness in the Outline menu.

In our example we've used a yellow highlighter 2, red ellipse 3 and arrow 4 and purple tick 5 from the emoji options. Click 'Capture' to save.

WINDOWS 10 & 11

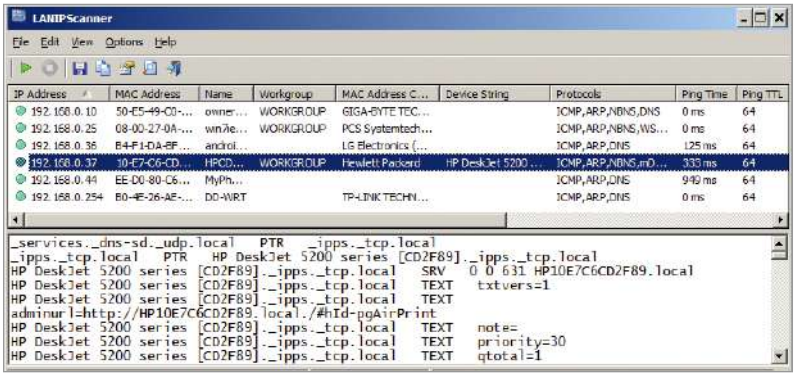
See *every* device connected to your home network

NirSoft already has tools for seeing which devices are connected to your network, including Wireless Network Watcher (www.snipca.com/56720), but they mostly only find devices that actively respond to certain methods, like ARP and NetBIOS.

ARP matches IP addresses to physical devices on your network, while NetBIOS is an older Windows method for identifying computers. That means PCs, laptops and routers show up easily, but anything in low-power mode, like smart speakers, TVs, printers and phones not using Wi-Fi, can go undetected.

NirSoft's new tool LANIPScanner (pictured below) goes further by using more methods at once. It still checks ARP and NetBIOS, but adds ping (asks devices to reply); mDNS (used by Apple devices and some smart gadgets to announce themselves); and SSDP (common for smart TVs and media devices). In other words, it shows *every* device on your network, giving you more chance of spotting those from neighbours piggybacking on your Wi-Fi.

To install it, visit www.snipca.com/56719 then scroll down to the Feedback section and click the download link.

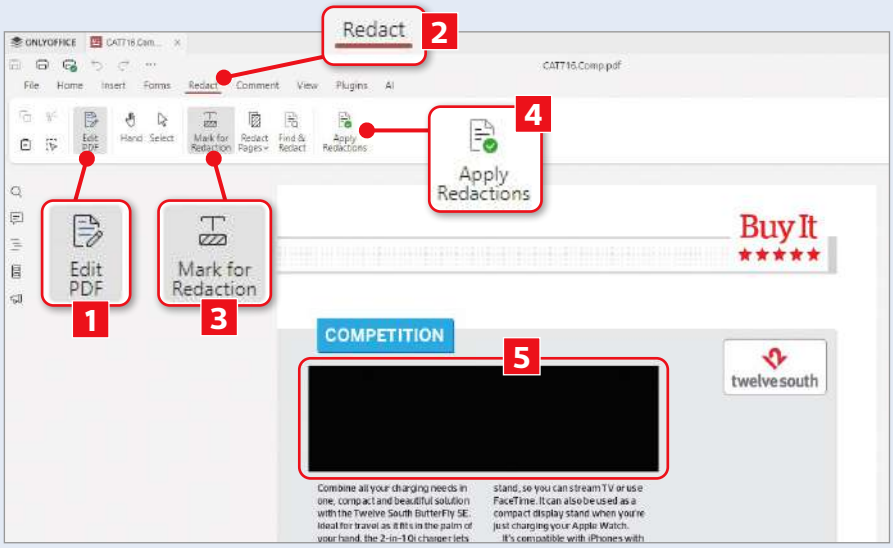

LANIPScanner
File Edit View Options Help
IP Address | MAC Address | Name | Workgroup | MAC Address C... | Device String | Protocols | Ping Time | Ping TTL
192.168.0.10 | 50-E5-49-C0-... | owner... | WORKGROUP | GIGA-BYTE TEC... | | ICMP,ARP,NBNS,DNS | 0 ms | 64
192.168.0.25 | 08-00-27-0A-... | win7e... | WORKGROUP | PCS Systemtech... | | ICMP,ARP,NBNS,WS... | 0 ms | 64
192.168.0.36 | B4-F1-DA-8F-... | androi... | | LG Electronics (... | | ICMP,ARP,DNS | 125 ms | 64
192.168.0.37 | 10-E7-C6-CD-... | HPCD... | WORKGROUP | Hewlett Packard | HP DeskJet 5200 ... | ICMP,ARP,NBNS,mD... | 333 ms | 64
192.168.0.44 | EE-D0-80-C6-... | MyPh... | | | | ICMP,ARP,DNS | 949 ms | 64
192.168.0.254 | B0-4E-26-AE-... | DD-WRT | | TP-LINK TECHN... | | ICMP,ARP,DNS | 0 ms | 64
_services._dns-sd._udp.local PTR _ipps._tcp.local
_ipps._tcp.local PTR HP DeskJet 5200 series [CD2F89]._ipps._tcp.local
HP DeskJet 5200 series [CD2F89]._ipps._tcp.local SRV 0 0 631 HP10E7C6CD2F89.local
HP DeskJet 5200 series [CD2F89]._ipps._tcp.local TEXT txtvers=1
HP DeskJet 5200 series [CD2F89]._ipps._tcp.local TEXT
adminurl=http://HP10E7C6CD2F89.local./#hId-pgAirPrint
HP DeskJet 5200 series [CD2F89]._ipps._tcp.local TEXT note=
HP DeskJet 5200 series [CD2F89]._ipps._tcp.local TEXT priority=30
HP DeskJet 5200 series [CD2F89]._ipps._tcp.local TEXT qtotal=1

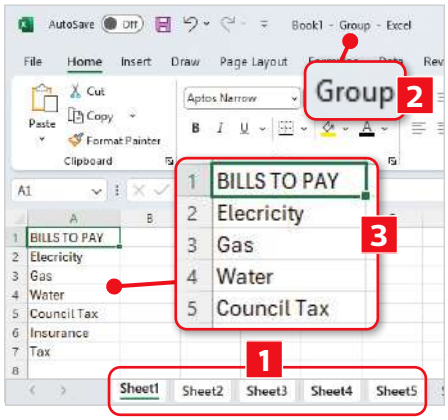
ONLYOFFICE

Redact words in PDFs

Version 9.1 of OnlyOffice, released in October, lets you redact sensitive information in PDFs. First, update to 9.1 by clicking About at the bottom left of OnlyOffice's main page followed by 'Check for updates'. Install any that appear.

Next, open a PDF in OnlyOffice's PDF Editor then click Edit PDF (1 in our screenshot). Now click Redact 2 at the top followed by 'Mark for Redaction' 3. Highlight the text you want to be redacted then click Apply Redactions 4. A black bar will appear across the text 5. There are also options for redacting entire pages and for finding specific words to redact.





LIBREOFFICE CALC & MICROSOFT EXCEL

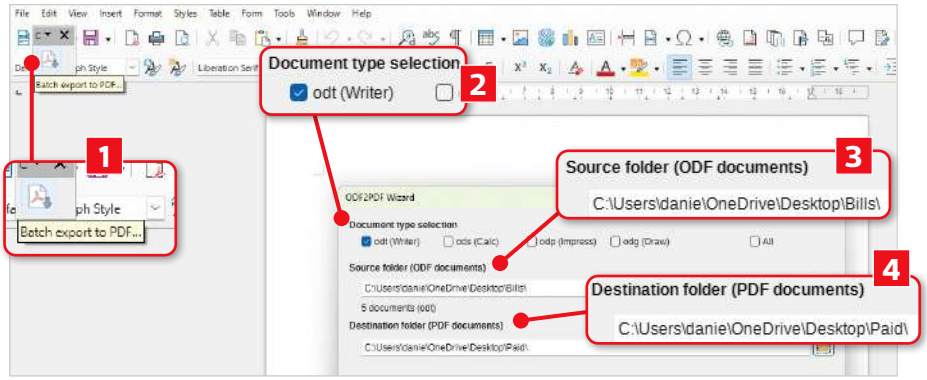
Place same data in the same cell across spreadsheets

You can quickly place the same data in the same cell across multiple spreadsheets, saving you loads of time. First, select all the spreadsheets you want to use by holding down Ctrl and clicking each tab at the bottom. In our screenshot above we've selected sheets 1 to 5 1. Notice that these have been called a 'Group' in the workbook's title 2. Now type anything into cells 3 and it'll be repeated in the other grouped spreadsheets.

LIBREOFFICE

Convert batch of ODF files to PDF

The LibreOffice extension ODF2PDF makes it easier to convert a batch of ODF files into PDFs. Visit www.snipca.com/56700 and click 'Download latest'. Now open the file and it should appear highlighted in LibreOffice's Extensions box. Click 'Add', Tools, Extensions, then highlight ODF2PDF and click Add. Install the file it takes you to, then restart LibreOffice.



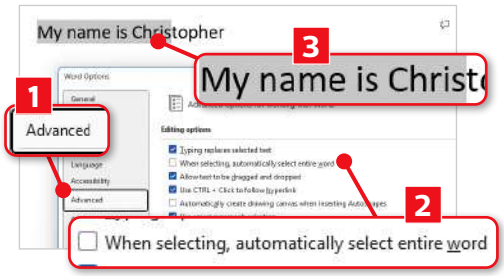
Now click the 'Batch export to PDF' icon top left (1 in our screenshot above) and tick the boxes to indicate the file types you're saving 2. Now select the source folder (where your ODF files are 3) and the destination folder (where you want them to be saved as PDFs 4). Finally click Next followed by Export.

MICROSOFT WORD

Select only parts of words

By default, Microsoft Word tries to highlight entire words when you click and drag your cursor over them. This is fine if you need to copy, cut or delete the whole words, but it's frustrating if you want to just select some words and only *part* of the next word.

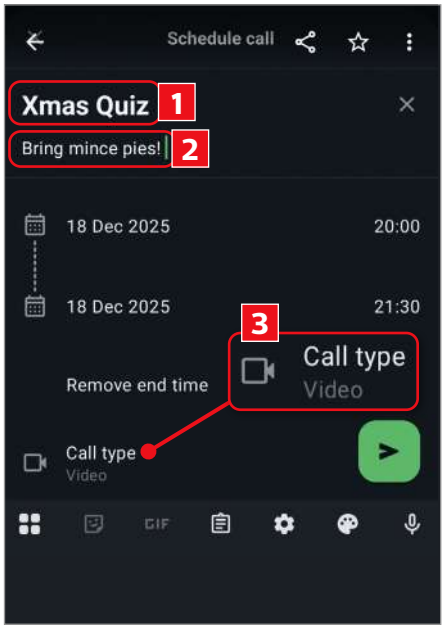
For example, we want to highlight 'My name is Chris' from 'My name is Christopher'. To do this, click File top left then Options at the bottom followed by Advanced on the left (1 in our screenshot below). In the 'Editing options' section untick 'When selecting, automatically select entire word' 2. Click OK to confirm. We can now click and drag our cursor over the words so it stops after 'Chris' 3 – or indeed at any point in any word. Before applying this setting Word would highlight every word as soon as the cursor moved over the first letter.



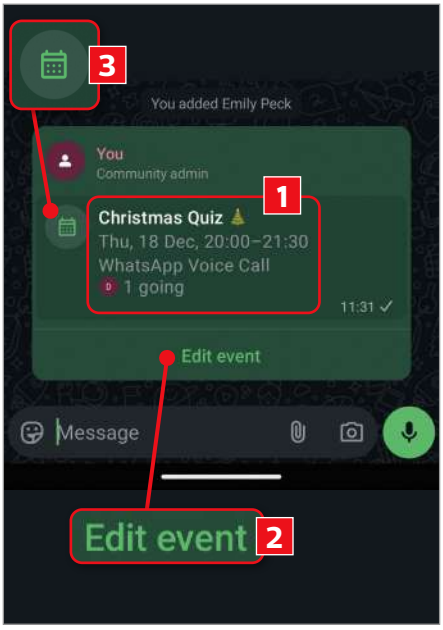
In The Club

Run a club or society? Here's how your tech can make it easier

Schedule group calls in WhatsApp



Type a name and description, set a time and date, then choose video or voice call



The meeting event will appear in your messages – tap the calendar icon to see its details

Members can add the meeting to their calendar, while you can copy a link to the meeting to send to others

In August, WhatsApp added the option to schedule audio and video calls, giving club members time to place them in a calendar so they don't forget. You can send invites to individuals, or to groups and communities you've created. All participants will be notified when the call is about to begin, and during the call you'll be notified when someone joins.

Set a time and date

Open WhatsApp on your phone or tablet and tap Calls at the bottom right. Now tap the green '+' button (with a phone icon inside), then tap 'Schedule call'. By default, it will be called 'Yourname's call' – tap this to change it ('Xmas Quiz' in our screenshot above 1). You can also add a description underneath 2.

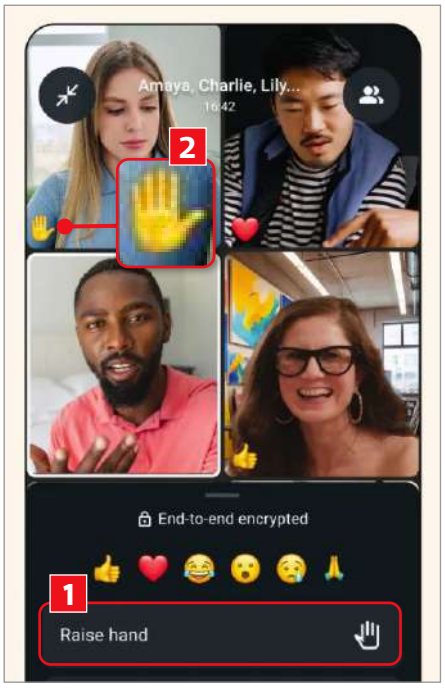
That day's date will be default. Tap this to pick another one on the calendar. Now tap the time to move the clock face to when the meeting is due to begin. If that's too fiddly, tap the keyboard icon at the bottom left to type a time instead. Leave the second date as it is – assuming the meeting ends on the same day. But tap the time to the right and set an end time for the meeting. Alternatively choose 'Remove end time' if you don't need one. Next, tap 'Call type' 3 and select Video or Voice (audio). Now tap the green send button and choose who you want to invite. You can select any group or community you've created.

Add the meeting to your calendar

Tap the send button again, at the bottom right, and the meeting will appear in the message you share with the people you invited (1 in our screenshot above). The 'Edit event' button 2 lets you make changes, including the option to cancel. Tap the message itself and you'll see who's going and who hasn't responded yet. Tap the calendar icon in the message 3 and you'll see details of the meeting.

This includes an option to add the meeting to your calendar (1 in our screenshot above right) – you should encourage your club members to do this. The calendar that appears will be the one that's set to open by default on the device – normally Google or Apple Calendar. There's also an option to copy the link to the meeting 2, to include in emails and messages in other apps.

Another new option in WhatsApp lets call participants tap the 'Raise hand' button (1 in our screenshot below) to indicate they want to speak 2.



Call participants can 'raise their hand' to indicate they want to speak

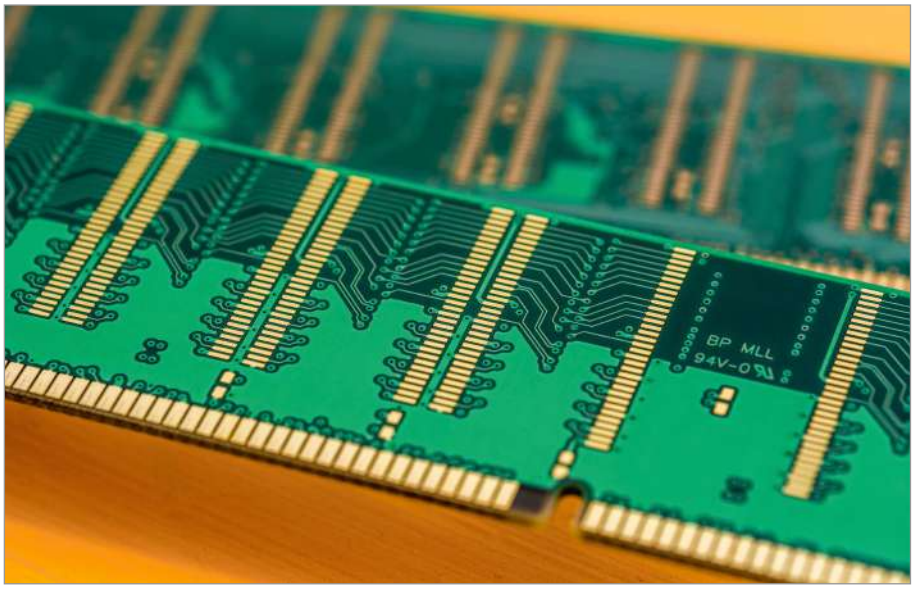
Next issue: Collaborate for free in OnlyOffice

What's All the

Fuss About...

Gold in your PC

There's a fortune in Windows 10 machines, but you won't see any of it



What is it?

There's gold in them there computers! UK electrical-waste specialists BusinessWaste (www.snipca.com/56681) estimates there could be a whopping £1.8 billion worth of gold and other precious materials hidden inside UK computers that have been rendered obsolete by Microsoft axing support for Windows 10.

What's gold used for in computers?

Along with silver it coats the connectors and chips on printed circuit boards, including RAM (see main picture), motherboards and graphics cards, as it resists corrosion and improves data transfer. Palladium and platinum also appear in capacitors and solder, while copper runs through almost every wire and circuit. Even your hard drive contains rare-earth metals such as neodymium in its magnets, while older solder often includes silver.

So, I'm gonna be rich?

Afraid not. That £1.8 billion figure represents a theoretical total value of the precious materials contained in *all* the computers in the UK that don't meet Microsoft's system requirements for Windows 11. An individual PC, for example, might contain as little as 0.2g of gold – that's less than £20 at today's trading prices.

How did they come to that figure?

BusinessWaste's calculations appear to be based on the total number of Windows 10 computers in the UK that could be in line for the scrapheap, which the company estimates at 14.4 million. It then uses data relating to metal-recovery rates from India-based electronic recycling specialist E-Parisaraa, to calculate the amount of each precious metal contained in that many PCs, including an estimated 12,750,000kg of copper, 18,730kg of gold, 30,130kg of silver and 6,240kg of other precious metals. Multiplying these weights by the current market value of each metal gives you the £1.8 billion figure.

Don't try this at home: you need specialist equipment to extract gold from your PC

And how do they know how many PCs still run W10?

Good point. BusinessWaste claims that "400 million devices are expected to be affected globally" without really explaining how it reached this figure. Digging into this a little, we can see that analysts Statcounter reckons Windows 10 still accounted for just over 40 per cent of the worldwide Windows market share in September 2025 (www.snipca.com/56682). If you apply that share to an estimated global installed base of around one billion PCs, you end up with roughly 400 million machines still running Windows 10, which is probably how BusinessWaste arrived at its number.

Is that an accurate figure?

Hard to know. Microsoft claimed Windows 10 was installed on a billion PCs back in its 2020 heyday (www.snipca.com/56683), but it may have been exaggerating. Also, many Windows 10 users will continue to use their computers, either by upgrading to Windows 11 or switching to an alternative operating system, such as Linux and ChromeOS.

All of which means the true number of devices left stranded by Microsoft's strict hardware requirements could be significantly lower than 400 million. But whatever the true figure, Windows 10's demise will still generate a lot of e-waste.

Is there any way of salvaging those metals?

Yes, but it's not as simple as cracking open your old PC and melting down the parts. The gold, silver and copper inside can only be recovered safely by licensed Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) recyclers, who use specialised chemical and mechanical processes to extract them without releasing toxins. You can see this demonstrated at www.snipca.com/56752 (pictured left).

Shall I bother?

No. It'd be easier to extract gold teeth with a nutcracker.

BIN YOUR SIM CARD

Physical SIM cards are fiddly to insert, restrictive to use and susceptible to theft. Robert Irvine explains why switching your phone to an eSIM is easier, cheaper and smarter

The SIM is an essential element of any mobile phone, letting you make calls, send texts and – on smartphones – access the internet. Over the years, the size of SIM cards has shrunk to mini, then micro then nano, but you can now avoid using one at all.

The growing popularity of eSIM technology gives you a more convenient and flexible way to connect to a mobile network. An eSIM, or embedded SIM, is a small chip soldered directly on to the motherboard of your phone.

Although the chip is physical, the eSIM works digitally by downloading and storing your network profile. This contains your phone number, authentication keys and network settings, which is the same data stored on a physical SIM card.

Unlike a traditional SIM, the eSIM can be reprogrammed with new network information, so you don't need to remove it to change provider or plan. The technology is standardised by the GSM Association (GSMA, www.gsma.com), which ensures only companies with GSMA-certified servers can send eSIM profiles to your phone.

In this feature, we explore the benefits of ditching your SIM card for an eSIM and explain how to do so. We also reveal which devices and mobile networks now support eSIMs, and why you should use a travel eSIM on your next holiday.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Check if your phone is compatible with eSIMs
- Switch to a new mobile network in a few minutes
- Find the cheapest deals on eSIM mobile plans
- Pay less for internet access when you're on overseas trips
- Convert your physical SIM card into an eSIM
- Transfer your phone number to an eSIM in a new phone

WHY YOU SHOULD SWITCH TO AN eSIM

Faster to set up than physical SIMs

When you order a new or replacement SIM card from a mobile network, you have to wait a day or two for it to arrive. You then need to remove the old SIM from your phone and insert the new one. This can prove fiddly if you can't get the card tray to pop out using a SIM-eject tool (see photo right) or paperclip, or if you drop the tiny nano SIM in the process.

With eSIMs there's no waiting time or physical card to insert. You simply scan a QR code with your phone's camera, enter details manually or use your network provider's app, to activate your new mobile plan in minutes.

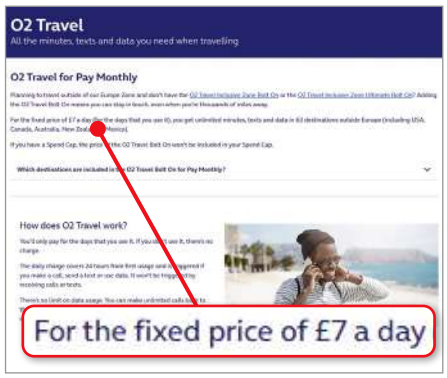
We provide full instructions for setting up an eSIM on page 56, whether you're requesting a new one from a mobile provider or want to convert your existing SIM.

Switch between multiple networks

Although dual-SIM phones let you insert two SIM cards to switch between two phone numbers, eSIMs offer much greater flexibility and convenience. Because an eSIM is digital, you can store multiple eSIM profiles on your phones – up to eight on many devices.

These can all use different networks with different numbers, which you can switch between as required – though only one eSIM number can be active at a time. If you own a dual-SIM phone, you can use an eSIM in tandem with a standard SIM, and have two active numbers with separate data and calling plans.

That's one reason eSIMs have become so popular with travellers, allowing them to use mobile internet abroad while keeping their home number – and all without having to swap SIMs.


O2 Travel
All the minutes, texts and data you need when travelling
O2 Travel for Pay Monthly
How does O2 Travel work?
For the fixed price of £7 a day

A travel eSIM will help you avoid paying high prices for data roaming when abroad

eSIMs spare you the fiddly business of swapping physical SIM cards

Save money on roaming fees

The other reason travellers love eSIMs is that it cuts the cost of using the internet while abroad. As we explained in our 'Don't pay for mobile roaming' feature in Issue 712 (page 60), the roaming policies of UK mobile networks can be expensive and confusing – especially when travelling outside Europe - and typically require buying a travel add-on or pass. For example, an O2 Travel 'bolt on' (pictured below left) costs £7 a day. If you exceed your data allowance, you'll face a hefty bill when you return from your holiday.

With a dedicated travel eSIM, you can buy a cheap data-only plan before you go abroad, and avoid paying any roaming charges for the duration of your trip. We explain more about travel eSIMs on page 55.

Protect your number from thieves

If your phone is lost or stolen, its contents may be protected by your PIN or biometric lock, but the SIM card can be easily removed and inserted in another phone. This allows thieves to use your number for malicious purposes, until you get your network to block the SIM. Physical SIM cards are also vulnerable to SIM-swapping attacks, whereby criminals transfer your number to a new SIM.

Because eSIMs are embedded in your phone, they can't be removed and used in another device, and are encrypted to stop them being extracted or cloned. Additionally, eSIMs can't be deleted or replaced without your authorisation, so thieves can't resell the stolen phone. See page 57 for more on this.

You may soon need one for a new phone

As we reported in Issue 719 (page 10), Apple's new iPhone Air (pictured below), which went on sale in September, is the first phone from a major manufacturer to be sold globally without a SIM-card slot (US models of the iPhone 14 and newer are eSIM-only). This gives you no choice but to use an eSIM, because you simply won't be able to insert a physical SIM.

Apple says removing the SIM-card slot from the iPhone Air "saves space internally, helping enable the unbelievably light and thin form factor". It also creates a space for a bigger battery, so the phone will last longer between charges.

While it's unlikely that other manufacturers will fully abandon SIM cards for another few years, eSIM-only phones could eventually become the standard. In the meantime, an increasing number of phones now support both connection methods, which we'll look at on page 52.

The ultra-thin iPhone Air is the first mainstream phone without a SIM slot

WHICH DEVICES NOW SUPPORT eSIMs?

Smartphones

The Google Pixel 2, released in September 2017, was the first smartphone with a built-in eSIM chip, though this was limited to US users on the Google Fi network. Since then, all Pixel phones – from 3 to 10 – have offered dual eSIM and nano-SIM support, including in the UK.

However, it was the launch of Apple's iPhone XS and XR in September 2018 that kicked off the eSIM revolution, and all subsequent iPhones have included eSIMs. The iPhone 14 (from 2022) was the first to be eSIM-only in the US, and the new iPhone Air extends that around the world.

Samsung introduced eSIMs to its phone range with the launch of the Galaxy S20 in 2020, and all its 'flagship' (high-end) models since then have included them.

The Moto G35 5G is currently the cheapest phone with eSIM support

Many budget and mid-range Samsung phones, such as M-series and older FE models, don't have eSIM chips. But the new Galaxy A36 and A56 5G – released in March, priced £399 and £499 respectively – do.

Happily, you don't need to spend a fortune to get an eSIM smartphone. Dozens of budget and mid-range Motorola devices now support eSIMs, including its latest G3x and G5x models. The cheapest is the Moto G35 5G (pictured above left), which costs just under £100 (www.snipca.com/56670).

Other mid-range phones with dual eSIM and nano-SIM support include Oppo's Reno13 5G series, priced from £329 (www.snipca.com/56672); the Nothing (3a) Pro, which costs £394 (www.snipca.com/56673); and the Sony Xperia 10 VI for £349 (www.snipca.com/56674). You can browse a full list of eSIM-compatible handsets at www.snipca.com/56676.

If your phone has an EID number then it has a built-in eSIM

To check whether your current phone supports eSIMs, open the Phone app and dial *#06#. A pop-up panel will open showing device information – if you see an EID (Embedded Identity Document) serial number (see screenshot below left), then your phone has an eSIM chip.

The Samsung Galaxy Tab Active5 tablet supports eSIMs

Tablets

Although most tablets connect to the internet over Wi-Fi, some models also have SIM-card slots that let you use a 4G or 5G mobile network. These slots are now being replaced or complemented by eSIM chips, making it even easier to get online when Wi-Fi isn't available.

Unsurprisingly, Apple was the first company to add eSIM support to its tablets, and all new 'Wi-Fi + Cellular' iPads since 2019 have eSIM chips – including Pro, Air and Mini models. Apple's newest devices, including the iPad Pro (8th Gen) that went on sale in October (www.snipca.com/56677), are eSIM-only and "not compatible with physical SIM cards".

Samsung's latest Galaxy Tab tablets support eSIMs as well as nano SIMs, including the S9, S10 and new S11 series, and the Galaxy Tab Active5 (www.snipca.com/56679, pictured above). See www.snipca.com/56678 for the full list of eSIM-compatible Samsung devices. Other tablet manufacturers have yet to catch up, at least with their devices sold in the UK.

Laptops

As with tablets, some laptops offer both mobile and Wi-Fi connectivity, and can now use eSIMs as well as traditional SIM cards. Microsoft's Surface range is the most notable example – its new Copilot+ Surface Pro laptop (pictured above) has dual eSIM and nano SIM support, but only its 5G, 13in model (£1,029 from www.snipca.com/56680).

Some new Microsoft Surface laptops connect to 5G using an eSIM

Laptops with eSIMs are currently aimed at business users rather than consumers, with prices to match. These include Lenovo's ThinkPad X1 series, priced from £1,600 (www.snipca.com/56686), and the Dell Latitude 7450, which costs nearly £1,900 with the required modem (www.snipca.com/56685).

Hopefully, prices will come down as eSIM technology becomes more popular.

Smartwatches

An eSIM in a smartwatch helps keep the design slim and light, and allows the wearable to work independently of your smartphone. This means you can make and take calls, send and receive messages, and access apps such as maps and music streaming, without having your phone to hand.

The Apple Watch Series 10 and 11 support eSIMs, as do the Samsung Galaxy Watch 8 and Ultra, and the Google Pixel Watch 3 (www.snipca.com/56687, pictured below). Just make sure you choose the model with 4G or 5G (sometimes called LTE or Cellular), though note this will bump up the price.

A smartwatch with an eSIM works independently of your phone

WHICH UK NETWORKS SUPPORT eSIMS?

All the major UK mobile providers – EE, O2, Three and Vodafone – now support eSIMs. You can either convert your current SIM into an eSIM, or get one with a new SIM-only plan and add it to your phone.

The networks also offer eSIMs when you sign up for a pay-monthly contract for a compatible phone. Most of the pricier phones we mentioned on the previous page are available through mobile networks, which will cut the cost of buying them outright (though you're likely to pay more over the course of your contract).

With Vodafone, for example, if you choose a phone with an eSIM such as the Samsung Galaxy S25 FE, iPhone 17 or Motorola Moto G35, the eSIM option will be pre-selected at checkout (see screenshot below). Unless you choose 'SIM card' instead, you won't receive a physical SIM with your new phone, so all you need to do is activate your eSIM.

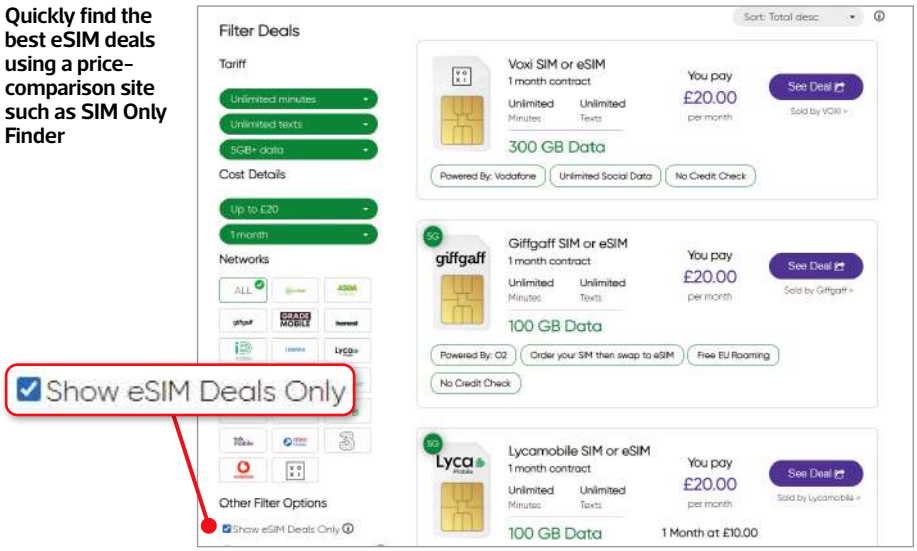
Vodafone and Three also provide eSIMs without a contract, through their SIM-only pay-as-you-go plans. Again, just select the eSIM option at checkout. The network will send you an email containing the QR code required for activation, so you can switch to the new plan in a matter of minutes – without waiting for a SIM to arrive in the post.

To swap your existing SIM card for an eSIM, you'll need to go through your online account with the relevant provider – or pop into one of the network's high-street stores. We'll provide more detailed instructions on page 56.

Get an eSIM from a virtual mobile network

Most UK MVNOs (Mobile Virtual Network Operators), which 'piggyback' on the networks of the big four providers (technically three since Vodafone and Three merged), now support eSIMs. These low-cost services include Giffgaff, Sky Mobile and Tesco Mobile (which use the O2 network); ID Mobile, Honest Mobile and Voxi (VodafoneThree); and Lyca Mobile, Mozillion and Spusu (EE).

Smarty finally introduced eSIM support in September (see screenshot above), but only for existing customers – new ones will be able to order eSIMs soon (www.snipca.com/56690). And Lebara is rolling out eSIMs in a 'phased manner', initially to new customers with an iPhone Air.



Quickly find the best eSIM deals using a price-comparison site such as SIM Only Finder

Smarty has finally introduced eSIMs – but only for existing customers

That leaves 1pMobile, which says it will "hopefully offer them in the next few months", and Asda Mobile.

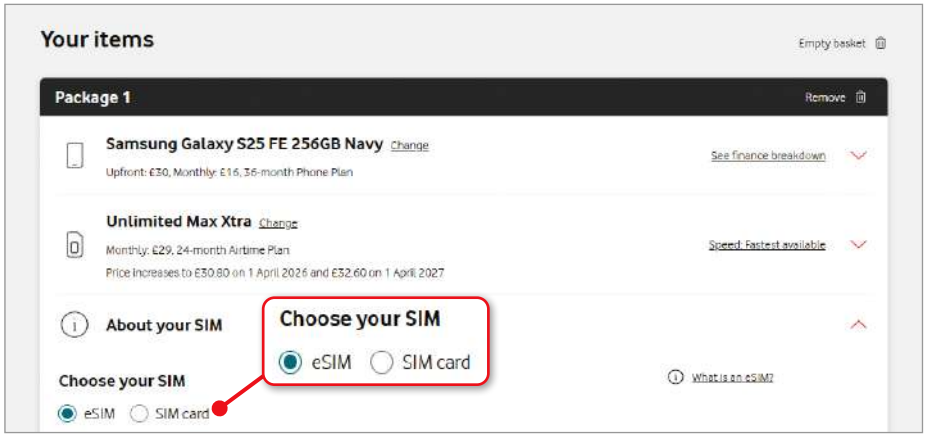
To get an eSIM from an MVNO, simply sign up for a pay-as-you-go, rolling or pay-monthly (contract) plan, and select eSIM as the SIM type. If you don't see that option, order a standard SIM and convert it to an eSIM later. Some MVNOs let you bundle your eSIM with a compatible phone, but – unlike the big providers – they don't have high-street shops you can go to if you have any problems. The exceptions are Tesco Mobile, which offers in-store support, and iD Mobile, which is partnered with Currys PC World.

Compare the latest eSIM deals

Because eSIMs are now available with all SIM-only contracts from the main UK networks, and most plans from MVNOs, comparing all available deals would take all day. To make things easier, visit a price-comparison site such as SIM Only Finder (www.simonlyfinder.co.uk) or GoCompare's SIM-Only Deals section (www.snipca.com/56692).

These let you specify how much data you need per month, your preferred contract length and the maximum amount you're willing to pay. They then filter their results to show matching plans, so you can click through to buy the most suitable. SIM Only Finder has the useful option to show eSIM deals only (see screenshot above).

These websites don't cover deals from every network, only their partners, but they include the four main providers and around a dozen MVNOs. It certainly saves you time visiting multiple sites individually.



Choose 'eSIM' when you sign up for a new phone or SIM-only contract

Computer active

READER OFFER!

ADD A DISC FOR £5.95

Upgrade to Windows 11 Pro for just £49.99!

Your PC almost certainly came with Windows 11 Home. But did you know it's easy to upgrade to **Windows 11 Pro** to get advanced features like BitLocker drive encryption?

There's no need to install a new version of Windows – just take your new Professional key, go to System, Activate, then select 'Change Product Key'.

To upgrade, visit **www.snipca.com/50563** and click the red **Buy Now** button on the right.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

This offer can be used by one person only, and expires at midnight on **18 November, 2025**. It's a lifetime licence for one computer.

WHY YOU NEED A TRAVEL eSIM

The eSIMs from UK mobile networks and MVNOs are designed to replace your physical SIM as your means of making calls, sending messages and accessing the internet. Travel eSIMs, in contrast, work alongside your current SIM or eSIM and are intended for short-term use when you go abroad.

They give you a tailored data plan for whatever country you're travelling to and connect you to local 4G and 5G networks. Choose the amount of data you'll need, and how long the travel eSIM will work for – from a few days to a whole month – to cover the duration of your trip.

With most providers of travel eSIMs, you install the eSIM on your phone before you depart, then activate it on your arrival. You can top up your data as required and use the eSIM next time you travel by adding a new plan.

Not only does a travel eSIM save you money on roaming add-ons and fees, but it ensures you enjoy speedy, reliable internet access wherever you go in your destination – often faster than at home. It also means you can avoid using often slow and sometimes dangerous Wi-Fi hotspots while you're on holiday.

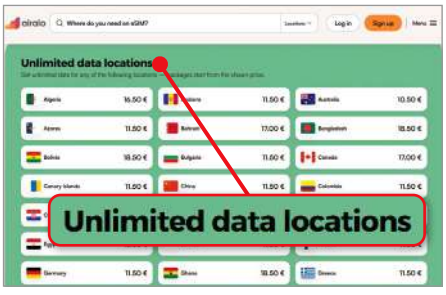
Most travel eSIMs are data-only, which makes them easy to set up and means you don't need to be assigned a local phone number or worry about international calling charges. If you need to call and message people back home, you can use WhatsApp to do so over the local mobile network. Here are the best services for different travel needs.

BEST FOR CHOICE

Airalo

www.airalo.com

Airalo offers travel eSIMs for more than 200 locations, and lets you choose between local, regional and global coverage (the Global option includes calls and texts). Its data plans range from 1GB for three days to 50GB for 30 days, and it also offers unlimited data for dozens of destinations (www.snipca.com/56699, see screenshot below left).



Airalo offers a huge choice of travel eSIMs, including unlimited-data plans

You can manage your travel eSIM through Airalo's highly rated mobile app, and top up your data when necessary. Airalo's prices are impressively low (though provided in Euros), and it's been operating since 2019, with more than 10 million users worldwide.

BEST FOR VALUE

easySIM

www.easysim.global

Although easySIM can't compare with Airalo for choice of destinations, its travel eSIMs for many countries are often cheaper in terms of gigabytes per pound. For example, a United States plan that gives you 10GB of data for 30 days costs just £16, compared with €20.50 (£18) from Airalo. Seven-day eSIMs for many European locations are priced as low as £2.99 for 1GB of data.

Owned by the company behind easyJet, easySIM is – aptly – easy to use, though it doesn't have a mobile app.

BEST FREE OPTION

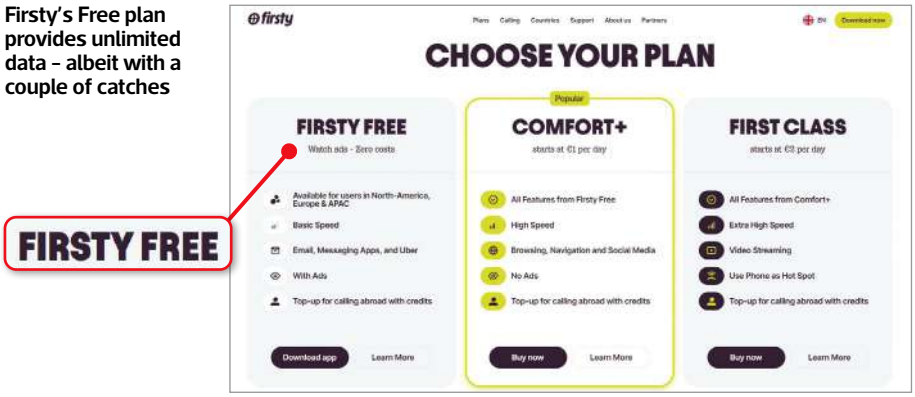
Firsty

www.firsty.app

If you don't want to pay for a travel eSIM, Firsty has a completely free, unlimited-data plan (see screenshot above) that covers Europe, North America and the Asia-Pacific region. However, there are two catches: connection speeds are very slow and you need to watch 30-second ads every 60 minutes.

Beat those restrictions by upgrading to its high-speed Comfort+ plan, priced from €1 per day, or its extra-high speed First Class plan, which costs from €2 per day and lets you use your phone as a hotspot. Everything is controlled through the Firsty app.

Firsty's Free plan provides unlimited data – albeit with a couple of catches



BEST FOR CALLS

Airhub

www.airhubapp.com

Airhub offers 'Data & Voice' plans for all its travel eSIMs, spanning over 190 countries. These assign you a local number for that destination, so you can make and receive calls, and send text messages.

There are several options to choose from for many countries, depending on how much data and how many minutes you'll need. Airhub's US prices are particularly cheap, starting from $3.49 (£2.60) for unlimited data, calls and texts for one-day use. But expect to pay from $30 (£22) for other regions.

BEST FOR CRUISES

GigSky

www.gigsky.com

GigSky travel eSIMs save you paying for an expensive Wi-Fi package on your cruise. They use maritime satellite networks on more than 200 cruise ships – simply specify which line you'll be sailing on – to deliver reliable internet on the open sea.

GigSky's 'Cruise+Land' data plans (see screenshot below) also cover your excursions in ports, by connecting to local mobile networks. But note they're much pricier than other travel eSIMs – for example, $35 (£26) for 1GB on a seven-day European cruise.

Exclusive Cruise + Land eSIM Data Plans
Cruise + Land eSIM Data
The only plan of its kind! Fast, reliable cellular at sea, in port, and while touring.

GigSky's travel eSIMs provide internet access at sea and on land

HOW TO SWITCH FROM YOUR CURRENT SIM

Set up a new eSIM on your phone

Provided your phone has an eSIM chip, switching to an eSIM is very straightforward. First, sign up for an eSIM plan with a mobile network, as we explained on page 53.

You'll be given a QR code to install the eSIM with – this is usually sent by email. You should view this code in your desktop browser, because you'll need to scan it with your phone's camera.

On Android phones, the steps for activating eSIMs vary according to the device. We used the following method on our Motorola Moto G54, which runs Android 15 - check your phone manufacturer's support site for instructions for your device.

Open the Settings app and tap 'Network & Internet' then 'SIMs & mobile network'. Press 'Download new SIM' then 'Set up an eSIM' (see screenshot below) and scan the QR code provided by the mobile operator. If that doesn't work, tap 'Enter activation code' and type the code from the email that begins with 1$ or LPA:1$. Press 'Download' to install and activate the eSIM, then go back to the 'SIMs & mobile network' screen to switch it on.

On Samsung Galaxy phones, go to Settings then Connections and select 'SIM manager'. Tap 'Add eSIM' followed by 'Scan QR code'.

On an iPhone, simply go to Settings then 'Mobile data' and choose 'Add eSIM'. Either scan the QR code or manually enter the details provided by the mobile network.

Convert your current SIM to an eSIM

Rather than start a new mobile plan, you can convert your physical SIM card to an eSIM, and transfer your phone number and current plan. Doing so will deactivate your old SIM, meaning you won't be able to use it again – though you can order a replacement from your provider.

To switch to an eSIM on an Android phone, log into your online account with your mobile network – either through its website or mobile app. Look for a 'Replace my SIM' option or similar in your plan or SIM settings, and select eSIM (see screenshot below). O2 has reportedly removed this option from online accounts, so you'll need to call the network or go to an O2 store.

Choose to activate the eSIM and you'll receive an email containing a QR code and activation instructions. Scan the QR code and tap 'Set up', then enter the confirmation code provided.

Your eSIM will now be activated – go to Settings then 'Network & Internet' or Connections, and tap 'SIMs & mobile network' (or similar) to switch it on. You should be prompted to make it your default for calls, messages and internet. To confirm the eSIM works, turn off Wi-Fi and try making a call or sending a text.

On an iPhone, converting your old SIM is much easier. Just open Settings, select Mobile Service and tap 'Convert to eSIM'.

Transfer your eSIM to a new phone

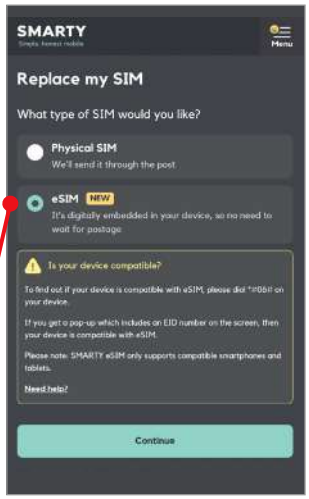
Another advantage of eSIMs is that you can transfer your number to another phone without inserting the SIM from your old device. Provided both phones are on the same Wi-Fi network, you can perform the transfer wirelessly.

On a new Android phone, go to the 'SIMs & mobile network' screen (see above), tap 'Download new SIM' and choose 'Transfer a SIM from another device'. Scan the QR code with your old phone's camera, then open the link and follow the instructions on the new phone to transfer your eSIM.

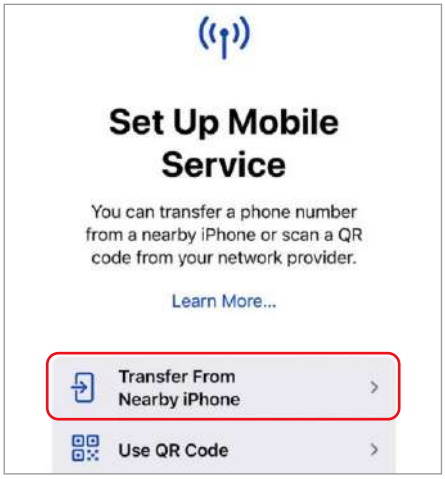
On a new iPhone, go to Settings then Mobile Service and select Set Up Mobile Service – or 'Add eSIM'. Tap 'Transfer From Nearby iPhone' (see screenshot below), then tap Transfer on your old iPhone. Tap 'Set Up eSIM' on your new iPhone, then 'Transfer from Another iPhone'.

Connect to mobile network
To add another SIM, set up a new eSIM.
To use a different SIM card, first remove the one that's currently in your device.
Learn how to use a SIM card
Set up an eSIM
Set up an eSIM
Transfer a SIM from another device
eSIM

Compatible phones include an option for setting up an eSIM



Ask your mobile network to replace your SIM with an eSIM


Set Up Mobile Service
You can transfer a phone number from a nearby iPhone or scan a QR code from your network provider.
Learn More...
Transfer From Nearby iPhone
Use QR Code

Transfer your eSIM from your old phone to a new device

Safely dispose of your old SIM

Once you've set up your eSIM, you can get rid of your old SIM card – but don't just bin it. Although iPhone SIMs don't contain any personal data, those in Android phones may store your contacts (though these are also backed up to your Google account).

To wipe this data, open the Contacts app and choose 'Manage SIM' (or similar). Select all listed contacts, tap the three-dot menu icon and choose Delete. Next, remove the SIM card and cut it up with a pair of scissors. Slice through the gold chip area several times to destroy the integrated circuit.

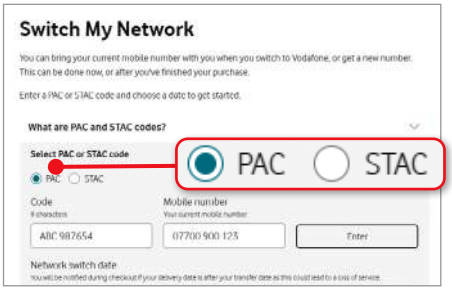
You can now put the bits in the bin, or – to be more environmentally friendly – place them in an e-waste bag with other small electronic items, and take the lot to a local recycling centre.

YOUR eSIM QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Can I move my phone number to a new eSIM?

Yes. If you've ordered an eSIM from a new mobile provider, you can transfer your phone number in the same way as with a standard SIM. Request a porting-authorisation code (PAC) from your current network, by texting PAC to 65075.

Enter the PAC when you sign up with the new eSIM provider, and are asked whether you want to keep your current number (see screenshot below). If you skipped this step, log into your online account once you've set up your eSIM, find the option to transfer your old number and enter the PAC.


Switch My Network
You can bring your current mobile number with you when you switch to Vodafone, or get a new number. This can be done now, or after you've finished your purchase.
Enter a PAC or STAC code and choose a date to get started.
What are PAC and STAC codes?
Select PAC or STAC code
PAC
STAC
Code
Mobile number
ABC 987654
07700 900 123
Enter
Network switch date

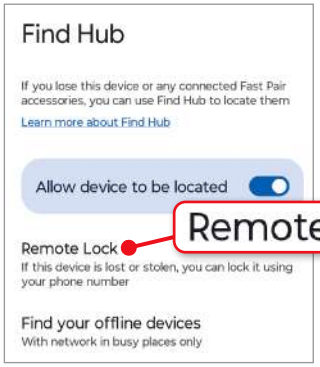
Transfer your old number to a new eSIM using the PAC you requested

Will switching to an eSIM affect network performance?

No. Because an eSIM connects you to the same mobile network as a physical SIM, switching has no effect on signal strength, call quality or internet speed – for better or worse. However, when you add a travel eSIM (see page 55), connection speeds depend on the overseas networks used by the provider.

What happens if my phone is lost or stolen?

As we mentioned on page 51, no one can clone or extract the eSIM from your phone – or even access it if your device is protected with a biometric screen lock. Your eSIM will also let you track and remotely lock a lost or stolen phone using Apple's Find My service or Google's Find Hub (see screenshot above).


Find Hub
If you lose this device or any connected Fast Pair accessories, you can use Find Hub to locate them
Learn more about Find Hub
Allow device to be located
Remote Lock
Remote Lock
If this device is lost or stolen, you can lock it using your phone number
Find your offline devices
With network in busy places only

An eSIM lets you find and remotely lock a lost or stolen phone

For peace of mind, ask your mobile network to disable the eSIM, to stop thieves making calls or sending texts from your number, should they be able to unlock your phone. All major UK providers offer dedicated 24/7 support for this purpose.

Once you have a new phone (or have dug out an old one), request a replacement eSIM from your network through your online account – or by speaking to customer service.

What happens if I delete my eSIM?

If you delete your eSIM after your physical SIM has been deactivated, your phone will lose all mobile service, including calls, texts and data. A 'No service' or 'No SIM' message will appear at the top of your screen, though you'll still be able to use Wi-Fi.

All compatible phones require confirmation to delete eSIMs (see screenshot above right), so you're unlikely to do so accidentally. In any case, only the eSIM profile is erased, not your mobile plan, so you can quickly download a new one from your provider.

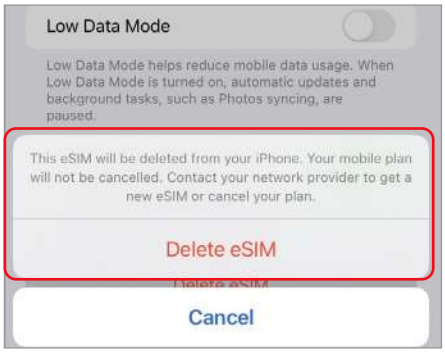
Again, this is different for travel eSIMs, which can be deleted without affecting the mobile service from your primary SIM or eSIM. You'll also need to delete your eSIM when selling your phone – this can be done manually or with a factory reset.

Get ready for iSIMs

With eSIMs now widely supported by the latest phones, manufacturers are already developing the next generation of SIM technology: iSIM (integrated SIM). An iSIM is directly built into your device's processor, rather than needing a separate chip.

This allows smartphones and other smart devices to become even thinner and smaller. An iSIM also uses less battery power, because fewer active components are drawing current.

As with an eSIM, you download an iSIM profile from the relevant provider. However, there are currently no phones that support iSIMs, and the technology is mainly being used in 'Internet of Things' devices such as smart meters and smart glasses.


Low Data Mode
Low Data Mode helps reduce mobile data usage. When Low Data Mode is turned on, automatic updates and background tasks, such as Photos syncing, are paused.
This eSIM will be deleted from your iPhone. Your mobile plan will not be cancelled. Contact your network provider to get a new eSIM or cancel your plan.
Delete eSIM
Cancel

Deleting an eSIM from your phone requires confirmation

What if my phone stops working?

If your phone breaks and will no longer turn on, contact your mobile network and explain what's happened. They'll deactivate the eSIM profile and issue a new one for your replacement device.

This is one disadvantage eSIMs have compared to traditional SIMs, which can be removed from a broken phone and transferred to a working device. ca

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Stop Meta spying on you

Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp have introduced new ways to collect your personal data. **Robert Irvine** explains how to protect your privacy from Meta's snooping

Facebook has always been notorious for collecting its users' data for advertising purposes. Although its parent company, Meta, boasts of investing over $8 billion in 'privacy progress' since 2019 (www.snipca.com/56750), Facebook and its fellow Meta apps Instagram and WhatsApp continue to make changes that compromise your privacy rather than respect it.

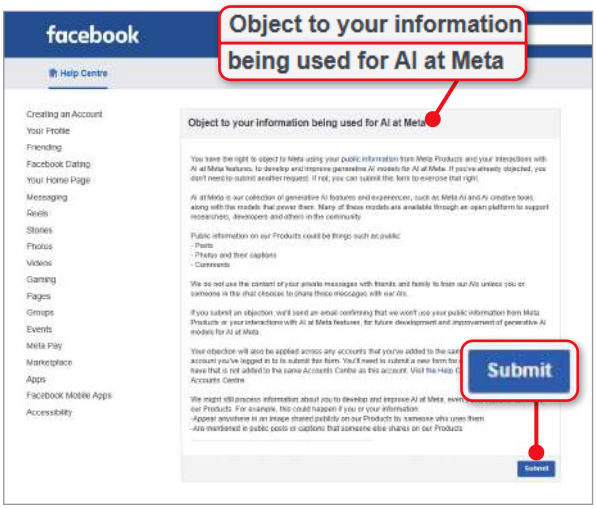
Here, we explain how to stop Meta spying on you through its social and messaging tools, and using your personal data for its own gain.

Stop Meta using your Facebook data to train its AI

Since June, Meta has used content you publicly share on Facebook and Instagram, including your status updates, photos, videos and comments, to train its AI models. This doesn't include private messages to friends and family, but you may still feel uncomfortable about your personal data being analysed by Meta AI.

Although Meta doesn't provided a dedicated option to switch off AI training, under GDPR regulations you have the right to object to your data being used for this purpose. You can't do much about content that's already been used to train AI, but you can ask Meta to stop doing it via an online form.

In your desktop browser, go to www.snipca.com/56746 and sign into your Facebook account to access the objection form. Enter your email address and reason for objecting, such as 'I do not consent to my content or data being used to train AI models' and click Submit (see screenshot below left). Meta will confirm your objection in an email.



You can object to Meta using your public data to train its AI models

Your objection also covers your Instagram account, as long as it uses the same Facebook login – if not, use the Instagram form at www.snipca.com/56747. There's also a form for objecting to AI training through WhatsApp (www.snipca.com/56748), but – as we'll explain later – it's easier to avoid sharing data with Meta AI in that app.

Stop Meta spying on you through other apps

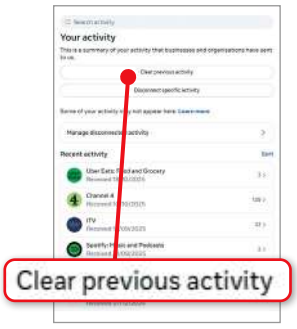
The most unnerving way Meta spies on you is by collecting data about your activities across other apps and websites. This happens even when you're not currently using Facebook or Instagram on your phone, tablet or PC.

The data is collected through hidden code, trackers and ad links in third-party apps and websites, which share details of content you view, actions you perform and even products you buy. Meta then uses this information to build a profile of your interests and target you with personalised ads.

Thankfully, it's possible to disable this underhand data collection, though Meta deliberately tucks the option away. In the Facebook mobile app, tap the three-line menu button and choose 'Settings & privacy' then Settings (on the Facebook website, click your profile icon top right to access these options).

Select 'See more in Accounts Centre' in the Meta Account Centre section, and tap or click 'Your information and permissions'. Here you'll find the all-important 'Your activity off Meta technologies' settings.

Choose 'Recent activity' and enter your Facebook password to see which companies have been sharing details of your activities with Meta. Some listed apps will have no obvious connection with your Facebook account, but because they use Meta's business tools, they're able to tell it what you've been doing.

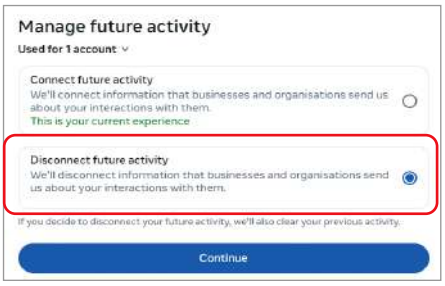


Clear data Meta has collected about you via other companies

To stop this happening, tap or click 'Clear previous activity' (see screenshot left) to delete data that's already been collected. This will also disconnect the listed apps and websites from your Facebook account – if not, choose 'Disconnect specific activity' to do so manually.

Now go back to the 'Your activity off Meta technologies' screen and tap or click 'Manage future activity'. Select 'Disconnect future activity' (see screenshot below) to stop Meta collecting information about you from third-party companies. They'll still share data with Meta, but it won't be linked to your Facebook account.

Disabling this setting should also stop your activity data being shared with Instagram. Double-check by choosing Accounts Centre in your Instagram settings and choosing 'Your information and permissions' then 'Your activity off Meta technologies'. Tap 'Manage future activity' and ensure 'Disconnect future activity' is selected.

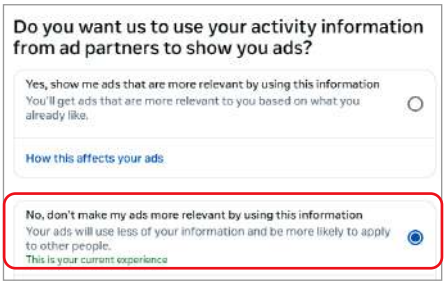

Manage future activity
Used for 1 account
Connect future activity
We'll connect information that businesses and organisations send us about your interactions with them.
This is your current experience
Disconnect future activity
We'll disconnect information that businesses and organisations send us about your interactions with them.
If you decide to disconnect your future activity, we'll also clear your previous activity.
Continue

Prevent Meta from spying on your future activities

Stop Facebook showing you personalised ads

Unless you pay for Meta's new ad-free subscription (see our news story in Issue 720, page 7), it's impossible to completely avoid ads on Facebook. However, you *can* stop Meta showing you personalised adverts "based on topics that we think you like from your activity".

Go to the Accounts Centre, as mentioned earlier, and tap or click 'Ad preferences'. Here you can review your 'Recent ad activity' – namely, ads you've interacted with, whether intentionally or accidentally – and your 'Ad topics'. These are the categories of ads Meta believes


Do you want us to use your activity information from ad partners to show you ads?
Yes, show me ads that are more relevant by using this information
You'll get ads that are more relevant to you based on what you already like.
How this affects your ads
No, don't make my ads more relevant by using this information
Your ads will use less of your information and be more likely to apply to other people.
This is your current experience

Stop Facebook using your profile information to target you with ads

match your interests, such as 'Vehicle insurance' or 'Snack foods'.

You can select a topic and choose 'See less' to encounter fewer ads of that type, but to protect your privacy it's better to disable personalisation altogether. Choose 'Ad settings' on the 'Ad preferences' screen, followed by 'Activity information from ad partners'. Tap or click 'Review setting' and select 'No, don't make my ads more relevant by using this information (see screenshot above)'.

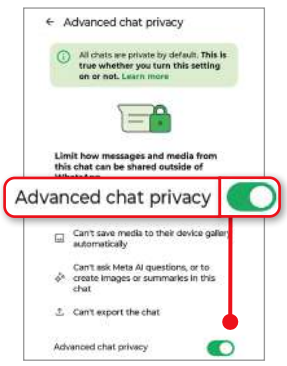
Next, choose 'Categories used to reach you'. Tap or click each entry under 'Choose profile information' and select No for 'Use this information to personalise your ads'. Tap/click 'Remove' for the 'Categories associated with you' to stop seeing those ads.

Switch on WhatsApp's Advanced Chat Privacy

In August, a message began circulating on social media regarding WhatsApp's new Advanced Chat Privacy feature. It warned that, unless you enable the option, "AIs can open group messages, see phone numbers, and even retrieve personal information from your phone".

That claim was strongly refuted by WhatsApp and isn't true (see www.snipca.com/56732), but the fact so many people believed it – and shared the message – suggests there's little trust in Meta's privacy policies. And suspicions about how WhatsApp treats our data were heightened by the addition of the unremovable Meta AI assistant earlier this year (last year in the US).

In response to the false viral post, WhatsApp explained that "Meta AI on WhatsApp can only read what you choose to share with it (it does not have access to all your chats or contacts)". It clarified that you need to directly invoke or message Meta AI to switch it on, and it can only see (and collect) data you share with it – your chats otherwise remain end-to-end encrypted.


Advanced chat privacy
All chats are private by default. This is true whether you turn this setting on or not. Learn more
Limit how messages and media from this chat can be shared outside of
Advanced chat privacy
Can't save media to their device gallery automatically
Can't ask Meta AI questions, or to create images or summaries in this chat
Can't export the chat
Advanced chat privacy

Advanced Chat Protection disables some AI features in WhatsApp chats

Advanced Chat Privacy, which sparked the misleading warning, prevents people you chat to from exporting your conversations and automatically saving photos and videos you share to their phones. It also disables options to ask Meta AI questions, and to create images or summaries in the chat (which you can't yet do in the UK), which is presumably where the confusion arose.

To enable Advanced Chat Privacy in a one-to-one chat, tap the three-dot icon and choose 'View contact' (in WhatsApp for Android), or the name of the chat (on iOS). Select 'Advanced chat privacy' and switch the option on (see screenshot left). In a group chat, select 'Group info' in the three-dot menu (on Android) or tap the group name (on iOS), and turn on 'Advanced chat privacy'. If you don't see that option, tap 'Group permissions' followed by 'Edit group settings'.

If you don't want to – or forget to – activate Advanced Chat Privacy, simply avoid interacting with Meta AI and your WhatsApp chats will be completely private. ca

Meta to use AI to personalise ads

Meta will soon combine AI with advertising to personalise the content and ads you see on Facebook and Instagram. It says this update will "improve the recommendations we provide for people across our platforms, so they're more likely to see content they're actually interested in" (www.snipca.com/56751).

That means your interactions with AI features on Facebook and Instagram will now tailor the content and ads you see. Unlike ChatGPT and Gemini, Meta AI doesn't have a 'private mode', so anything you ask it can be shared with Meta's advertising partners.

That's a huge invasion of privacy and a good reason not to use Meta AI, especially as you can't opt out of your data being used to personalise ads. Thankfully, the UK and EU won't (yet) be getting the new AI-powered recommendations when they're introduced in December.

Play games on your TV (without a console)

Think you need an expensive console to play games on your telly? Think again. **Jonathan Parkyn** explains why your phone, laptop or streaming stick could be all you need

Gaming doesn't often crop up in *Computeractive*, but maybe it should. Ofcom research last year (www.snipca.com/56742) revealed that gaming is definitely not just for kids – around 52 per cent of adults regularly play games too. Their popularity is partly down to the rise of TV gaming, and there's a great variety (it's not just blasting aliens and zombies). Here's what you need to do to game on your TV.

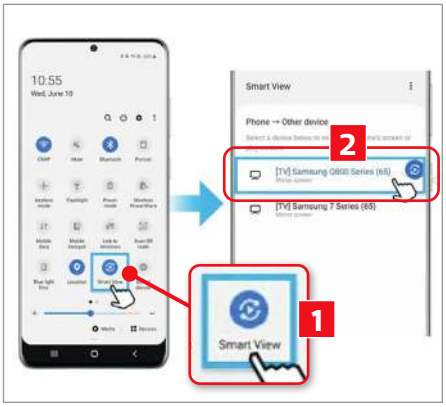
Cast from your phone, tablet or laptop

Casting from your device shows whatever is on its screen on your TV – and that can include games. You'll need a TV (or a connected TV stick or set-top box) that supports Miracast, Apple's AirPlay 2 or Google's Cast/Chromecast. Your phone, tablet or laptop must support the same casting standard, and be on the same Wi-Fi network as the TV, stick or box.

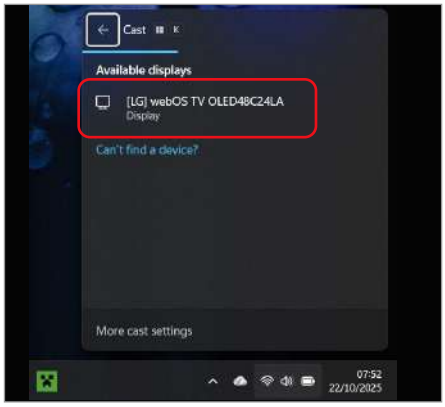
It's not always obvious which wireless display standard(s) your devices support. As a rule, Apple devices work with AirPlay 2; most Android devices use Cast/Chromecast; and most Windows 10 and 11 laptops use Miracast. To find out which standards your TV supports, check its instructions or manufacturer's web page.

Cast your games wirelessly

Precise Android settings vary depending on your model. In most cases, pull down the Quick Settings from the top of the screen and tap the Screen Mirroring icon – this may be labelled Screen Mirror, Cast or Smart View (as on this Samsung phone – 1 in our screenshot below left). Select your TV 2 in the list that opens and follow any instructions.



On this Samsung phone you tap Smart View then select your TV



In Windows, press Windows key+K to open all casting options, then select your TV

Similarly, with an iPhone or iPad, swipe down from the top right of the screen to open the Control Centre, tap Screen Mirroring, then select your AirPlay-compatible TV.

On a Windows 10 or 11 PC, press Windows key+K and select your TV (see screenshot below left). You may also need to press Windows key+P to choose your display mode – the best option is usually 'Second screen only', treating your TV as a second monitor.

What if you can't cast wirelessly?

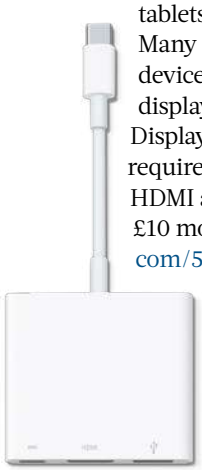
If your TV doesn't support your device's wireless display standard, consider buying a TV stick or set-top box that does. For example, iPhone owners with TVs that don't support AirPlay 2 could buy an Apple TV box (from £140, www.snipca.com/56759). For Android, there's Google's TV Streamer (£99 from www.snipca.com/56762), which supports Google Cast for mirroring games and apps from most Android phones and tablets.

For Windows laptops and Android devices that only allow full display mirroring via Miracast, you could consider adding a Miracast receiver dongle to your TV (if it doesn't support Miracast). There are lots available online, but don't buy cheap unbranded devices. A safer option is to use an Amazon Fire TV stick (from £40 at www.snipca.com/56765), which works with Miracast.

Connect your device with a cable

If you can't get wireless casting to work, try a wired connection instead. This has the added benefit of eliminating problems like delays, which are a common downside of casting wirelessly.

Most modern laptops have an HDMI socket you can use to connect them to your TV with an HDMI cable. Phones and tablets are a little trickier. Many modern Android devices support wired display connections via DisplayPort Alt Mode – this requires a basic USB-C-to-HDMI adapter (such as this £10 model from www.snipca.com/56766). Check your device's specs before buying.



Connect your iPhone or iPad to your TV using Apple's USB-C Digital AV Multiport Adapter

For iPhone and iPad you'll need either Apple's USB-C Digital AV Multiport Adapter (£60 from www.snipca.com/56767, pictured left) or Lightning Digital AV Adapter (£50 from www.snipca.com/56768), depending on the age and connector on the device. There are cheaper third-party options, but only use those that are MFi-certified (Made for iPhone/iPad). Once everything is connected, select the correct HDMI input on your TV and your device's screen should appear automatically.

Play games on Netflix

Until recently, you could only play Netflix games through its Android/iOS apps, but it now lets you play them on its TV app. All Netflix subscription tiers include access to games, with no extra charge. However, TV gaming is still in beta and available only to selected users on supported TVs. Check if you can play by opening the Netflix app on your TV and looking for a row or tab labelled Games.

Scan the QR code to play Netflix games with your phone or tablet

You'll have to play with your phone or tablet. Select a game then scan the QR code (pictured below left). In Android, this opens the Netflix app and connects your device as a controller. On iPhones and iPads, it will prompt you to install the separate Netflix Game Controller app.

Download games to your TV

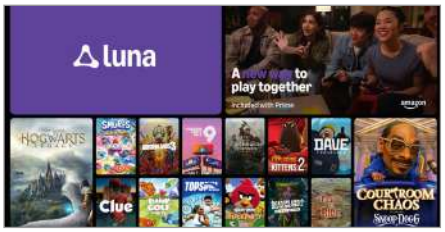
Some smart TVs offer games you can download and play directly on the TV itself. Models running the Android TV operating system, Samsung TVs using Tizen OS, and LG sets running webOS, for instance, usually include a 'Games' section in their app store. Launch your TV's app store and see if any game titles are listed for installation.

Most of the games you'll find in these stores tend to be casual in nature, rather than full console-grade blockbusters. Examples include racing games like Asphalt 8 (on Android TV), Tetris (Hisense and Sharp models running Roku OS) and Sudoku (LG models).

In many cases you can play using your TV remote as controller, though for faster-paced titles you'll want a physical controller (see box above). If your TV's app store doesn't offer a games section, your TV stick or set-top box might. Amazon Fire TV and Apple TV devices offer games in their app stores, for example.

Use an online gaming service

These work much like Netflix streams films. Powerful hardware in the cloud runs the game, and your TV receives the video feed. That means you can play graphically impressive titles without needing a high-end console or PC under your telly. Popular game-streaming services in the UK include Xbox Cloud Gaming, Nvidia GeForce NOW and Amazon Luna (pictured below).



Amazon Prime members get some Luna games every month

Look for these services in your TV's app store, or you may be able to install them on a TV stick or set-top box, such as an Apple TV or Fire TV device. To use Xbox Cloud Gaming you'll need to subscribe to Xbox Game Pass Ultimate (£14.99 a month), while Nvidia GeForce NOW starts at £8.99. Amazon Prime members get a small selection of Luna games every month, but for more you have to pay £8.99 a month. ca

Connect a controller for smoother games

Using a wired (USB) or wireless (Bluetooth) game controller instead of your TV's remote provides smoother gameplay. Many smart TVs support controllers (check its specifications), as do most TV sticks and set-top boxes. Plug a wired controller into a spare USB port – it may be recognised automatically. If not, go to your TV's settings under 'remote and accessories' to set it up.

Setup instructions vary for Bluetooth controllers. You'll usually need to start by putting your controller into pairing mode (check its instructions), then navigate to your TV's settings and look for pairing options. On recent LG TVs, for example, go to Settings, General, External Devices, then Connect Bluetooth Controller.

To cast games from a phone or laptop, connect a controller directly to your device. In Windows 11, click Settings, 'Bluetooth & devices' then 'Add device'. In iOS, tap Settings, then Bluetooth, while Android users should tap Settings followed by 'Connected devices'.

If you don't already have a gamepad or controller, you can buy one cheaply online. We recommend 8Bitdo's Xbox-like wired controller for £17 (www.snipca.com/56771, pictured), and Bluetooth model for £40 (www.snipca.com/56772).

Problems Solved

Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Can I connect my retro computer to a modern TV?

Q Having owned several computers when I was younger, I recently bought an old Atari ST PC bundled with a few games. I was rather fond of my ST years ago, so this was just for nostalgic reasons. It's now been delivered but when I plugged it in I realised it won't fit any of the connections on the back of my various TVs (d'oh!).

I have looked on places like eBay and Amazon but none of the results I've found are very clear about what I need and, if I'm honest, I found it all a bit confusing as to which lead or connection is required.

Could you point me in the right direction? I can't wait to get stuck into the classic Dungeon Master game again, so I'm really hoping you can help!

Jamie Arthur

Linkfor's SCART-to-HDMI converter supports RGB conversion

A Technology marches ever onwards so the problem of older gadgets not working with newer devices is a perennial one. Though there isn't always an easy solution, it's usually possible to string together a solution to connect a retro computer to a modern TV using a series of cables and adapters.

We think your question will be of wider interest to owners of other retro systems, so we'll talk in both general and specific terms.

Now, specifically with your Atari ST, it's important to understand that there are several different models. These could output to a traditional (RF/UHF) TV or an RGB monitor – or both. So, the first step is to determine exactly which model you've bought. If you're not sure, the information should be displayed on the serial-number sticker on the machine's underside.

With that noted, it's time to head to the shops. Well, not quite. For understandable reasons, the required cables and converters tend to be niche products – this is both generally true, and also specifically in your case. So, while you might find what you need on eBay or Amazon, it won't necessarily be easy.

Instead, anyone wanting to revive a computer from a previous era would be wise to immerse themselves in machine-specific retro websites and forums – where subjects like this are regularly discussed.

Specifically with your ST, you'll probably need three components: an RGB-to-SCART lead (pictured below); a SCART-to-HDMI converter; and a standard HDMI-to-HDMI cable. The last of these is commonplace these days so you might have one lying around, but if not Amazon sells them cheaply for around £4 (www.snipca.com/56381).

You'll need an RGB-to-SCART lead to connect an old PC to a modern TV set

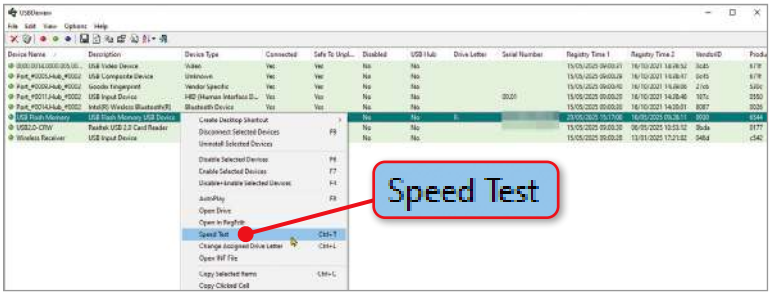
You can pick up the RGB-to-SCART from a specialist supplier like Retro Computer Shack (www.retrocomputershack.com) for around £17, but be sure to buy one designed for your specific ST model (www.snipca.com/56382). As for the SCART-to-HDMI converter, you can buy these on eBay and Amazon easily enough but avoid the temptation to buy the very cheapest, as you need one that supports RGB conversion – such as the Linkfor model pictured above (£34 from www.snipca.com/56383).

Finally, you just need to connect them all. Plug one end of the RGB-to-SCART lead into your Atari ST, and the other end into the SCART converter. Then plug the HDMI cable into both the SCART converter and your TV and you should be good to go.

How fast are my laptop's USB ports?

Q I always thought a blue USB port meant fast USB 3.0, but a friend of mine reckons that's not true. Who's right here? Either way, is there an easy way of telling which standard or speed a particular USB port is? My HP laptop, which is a few years old, has two blue ports – how can I tell which speed they are?

Dougie Holden



Use Nirsoft's USBDeview tool to analyse the speeds of your PC's ports

A While it's generally true that a blue USB socket indicates USB 3.0, it's not a strict standard – more a recommendation from the USB Implementers Forum (USB-IF, www.usb.org) when USB 3.0 was first launched over a decade ago. So, a rectangular USB port with blue plastic inside is probably USB 3.0, but it's not guaranteed. Besides, the colour doesn't reliably tell you the actual speed.

Things get more complicated because USB-IF's branding of the standards is a total mess. USB 3.0, for example, supports up to 5Gbps; USB 3.1 doubles that to 10Gbps; and USB 3.2 Gen 2x2 goes up to 20Gbps.

There are also different connector types. There's the rectangular USB-A port, which you have on your laptop, but USB 3.0 and later versions can also use USB-C connectors, which look different, being a smaller, oval connector.

So, while blue ports often mean USB 3.x speeds, of between 5 and 20Gbps, the colour alone isn't a foolproof guide. If you look closely at the ports themselves they might be labelled with an SS symbol, which stands for SuperSpeed – perhaps with the number 5, 10 or 20 to indicate a 5, 10 or 20Gbps transfer rate.

Alternatively, we'd suggest using NirSoft's free USBDeview tool to analyse the specifications of your HP laptop's ports, and to test their performance. It's a free download from www.snipca.com/56384. The program gathers a lot of data about ports and connected devices, and displays much of this as code numbers. You'll need to look up the meanings of yours on the USB-IF's Defined Class Codes database at www.snipca.com/56385.

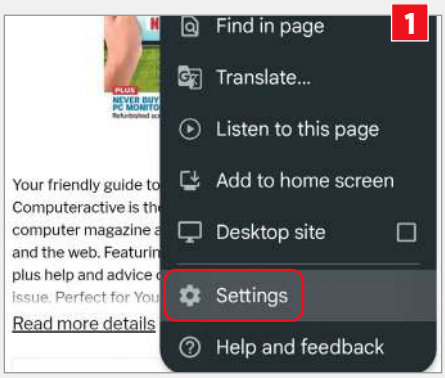
To test the speed using USBDeview, right-click a connected USB device and then choose Speed Test (see screenshot). Now click Start Test and wait while the test proceeds.

A result measured in tens of megabytes (MB) per second suggests a USB 2.0 port (or device), while USB 3.x sockets and devices should return MB/s values in the hundreds.

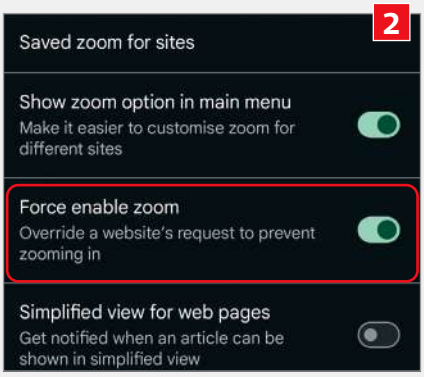
Why won't my Android Chrome app zoom into websites?

Q After years of being locked into iOS with my Apple iPhone, I decided to break free by jumping to Android and Google's Pixel 10 phone – and I love it! I've fixed several small annoyances, but one that still catches me out is the fact that I can no longer pinch to zoom on some websites. This feature does work on some sites, but it's pretty random as to which. If I view the same websites on my iPhone, I can zoom in – so it seems to be an issue with Android. Do you know how to resolve this?

Paul Thurston



To zoom into websites via Chrome on Android, tap Settings in the browser's menu...


2
Saved zoom for sites
Show zoom option in main menu
Make it easier to customise zoom for different sites
Force enable zoom
Override a website's request to prevent zooming in
Simplified view for web pages
Get notified when an article can be shown in simplified view

...then tap Accessibility and switch on the 'Force enable zoom' slider

A It *is* to do with Android, or more specifically its default Chrome web browser. Some developers include code in their websites to disable the ability to zoom, presumably to ensure the layout appears how they intend.

Android and Google's effectively ignores any hard-coded instructions along these lines, so users of that browser should be able to pinch to zoom on almost any website. But by default Chrome does respect developer wishes, so that explains the difference.

We happen to think it's pretty silly that developers impose such restrictions but, thankfully, it's easy to make Chrome behave like Safari in this regard. First, tap to open the Chrome menu (three dots, top right), then tap Settings (see screenshot 1). Next, scroll down and tap Accessibility. Finally, switch on the 'Force enable zoom' slider 2, and you can now zoom into any content.

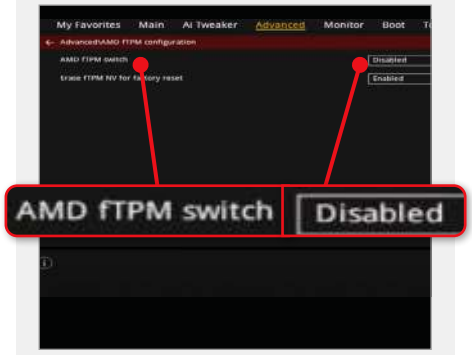
How can I enable my TPM chip?

Q My desktop PC is an Acer Aspire XC-705, purchased in 2016. Microsoft says this isn't suitable for upgrading to Windows 11. In Issue 714's Letters section, Roy Rolt said he found the TPM 2.0 chip in his BIOS, enabled it, and his computer was then fine for upgrading to Windows 11. I've looked in my BIOS but don't know where to find TPM 2.0. Please can you tell me where I can find it?

Mike Whitehead

A What Roy was talking about is what's known as a 'firmware TPM', or fTPM, rather than a distinct TPM chip. This technology has been integrated into PC processors for a number of years but sometimes isn't enabled (see screenshot below). Doing so via the UEFI/BIOS will indeed add TPM capabilities to a PC. Just to be awkward, Intel brands it Platform Trust Technology (PTT), rather than fTPM, so that's what you may need to look for in the BIOS – if the feature exists at all.

Your nine-year-old PC has an Intel Core i3-4160 processor. Sadly, this does not have fTPM/PTT. This CPU is also several generations below Microsoft's supposed minimum requirements for Windows 11. You could in theory still force an upgrade using registry tweaks, but your particular processor's generation is significantly below where even we would say this might work.



fTPM isn't always enabled in your PC's BIOS

Do I need to ditch my TP-Link router?

Q I have one of the TP-Link routers that you suggested should be replaced because of security considerations (see Issue 713, page 7). I am using it solely as a wireless access point downstream of my ISP router and have disabled the DHCP function. Do I still need to replace the router? Thank you for a most useful magazine.

Michael Wild

The TL-WR940N is one of TP-Link's older routers that should be replaced for safety reasons

A For the benefit of other readers, the specific routers in question are the TL-WR940N (versions 2 to 4, pictured right), TL-WR841N (8 to 10) and TL-WR740N (1 and 2). All these models are well over a decade old, and no longer supported by TP-Link – so the flaws identified by the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA, www.cisa.gov) will never be fixed. Those flaws are real and CISA says that they're being actively exploited (www.snipca.com/56386, see screenshot below).

We know that your router is purely being used as an access point and is not itself handing out IP addresses to devices on your wider network, but that does not make it safe. The security problems with your router are serious. While the chances of your setup being directly targetted are low, vast numbers of online bots are constantly searching for vulnerabilities – so it's probably only a matter of time before your system is 'sniffed' out.

In short, we're afraid the only truly safe option is remove this broken router from your setup.

America's Cyber Defense Agency
NATIONAL COORDINATOR FOR CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE SECURITY AND RESILIENCE
ALERT
CISA Adds Two Known Exploited Vulnerabilities to Catalog
CVE-2023-33538 TP-Link Multiple Routers Command Injection Vulnerability
These types of vulnerabilities are frequent attack vectors for malicious cyber actors

US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency says that several of TP-Link's older routers are now being actively exploited by cyber-criminals

Q: Can I fit a second drive in my laptop?

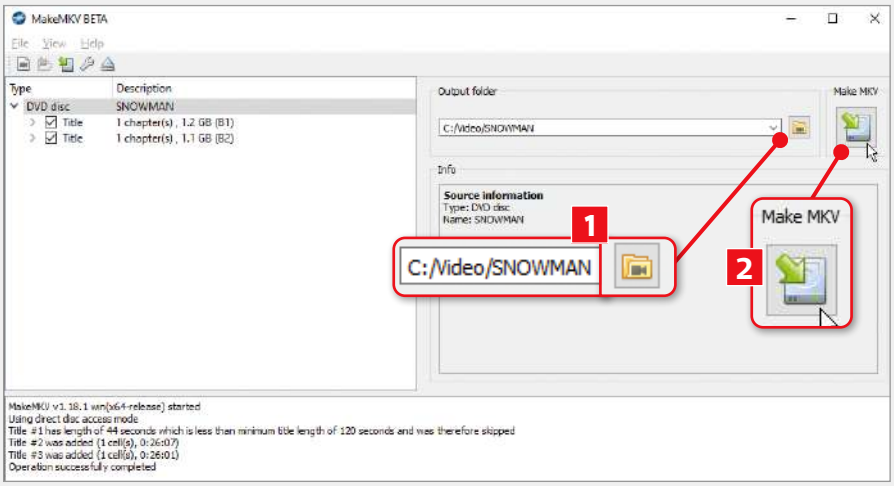
A: Issue 695, page 66 – find it on our 2024 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/53433

How do I rip my collection of CDs and DVDs?

Q I have a collection of about 100 CDs and 15 DVDs that I'd like to dispose of to make some cupboard space, but I'd like to keep the contents. I have an external disc drive connected to a Geekom IT12 mini PC, and I was thinking of copying the discs to an external hard drive. Is this a feasible option? What's the easiest way to transfer them?

Neil Howells



Click the folder icon then the Make MKV button

A Yes, this was once a commonplace and pretty straightforward task. As time marches on we suppose many people will have forgotten how to do it – so we're happy to recap.

First, for the CDs, just open Windows Media Player. Insert a disc into your drive and wait for a moment, then a Rip CD button should appear. You can just click this but we'd advise first adjusting a couple of key settings. So in the same menu, click 'More options', then the Rip Music tab. In the 'Rip music to this location' section, click the Change button then use the Browse box to choose your external drive. Click OK, and then you're good to click the Rip CD button.

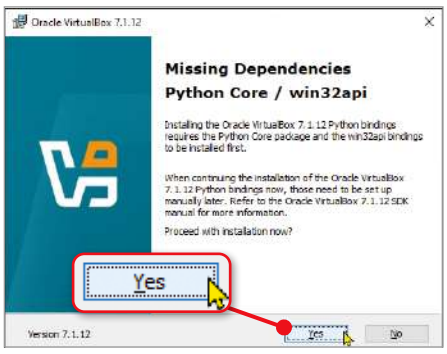
For DVDs, we'd recommend the free MakeMKV app (www.makemkv.com). The process is very similar to CDs. Insert a disc then click the drive icon to open the DVD or Blu-ray, at which point MakeMKV will automatically strip out any copy protection it finds on the disc. Then, just click the folder icon under 'Output folder' to choose your hard drive (1 in our screenshot), before clicking the Make MKV button 2.

Note, this produces an MKV file that can be viewed in many popular players these days, such as VLC (www.videolan.org). If you want to convert MKV files to the MP4 standard for wider compatibility, grab the free HandBrake program (from https://handbrake.fr) – and use that to transcode between formats.

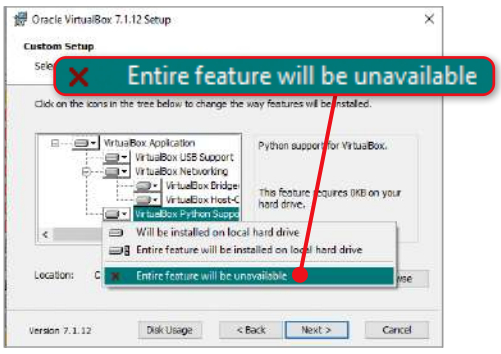
What's this message when upgrading VirtualBox?

Q After reading about VirtualBox (www.virtualbox.org) in your magazine I've been using it for years to run old software in Windows XP. I'm currently on version 6.0 but keep getting urged to upgrade to 7.1. I eventually gave in to the nagging, but when I tried to install 7.1 I was met with a warning message about Python and 'missing dependencies'. I'm reluctant to proceed in case I end up breaking my current VirtualBox setup. I don't recall such problems when upgrading VirtualBox in the past. I'm running Windows 10 (and will be one of those reckless souls who will continue to do so). Can you help?

Allan Postgate


Oracle VirtualBox 7.1.12
Missing Dependencies
Python Core / win32api
Installing the Oracle VirtualBox 7.1.12 Python bindings requires the Python Core package and the win32api bindings to be installed first.
When continuing the installation of the Oracle VirtualBox 7.1.12 Python bindings now, those need to be set up manually later. Refer to the Oracle VirtualBox 7.1.12 SDK manual for more information.
Proceed with installation now?
Yes
No
Version 7.1.12

It's safe to click 'Yes' to continue upgrading VirtualBox when you see this message


Oracle VirtualBox 7.1.12 Setup
Custom Setup
Entire feature will be unavailable
Click on the icons in the tree below to change the way features will be installed.
VirtualBox Application
VirtualBox USB Support
VirtualBox Networking
VirtualBox Bridge
VirtualBox Host-C
VirtualBox Python Suppo
Python support for VirtualBox.
This feature requires 0KB on your hard drive.
Will be installed on local hard drive
Entire feature will be installed on local hard drive
Entire feature will be unavailable
Location:
Version 7.1.12
Disk Usage
< Back
Next >
Cancel

Avoid receiving the message entirely by tweaking this section of the installation process

A The warning message you're encountering is worded alarmingly, but it's actually nothing to worry about. It relates to some advanced and niche features that most people will never use. In short, they allow software developers to control VirtualBox using custom scripts.

So, in effect the message is telling you that, without Python installed, these advanced aspects will be unavailable – at least until such time as Python is installed. But 99 per cent of people won't ever need them, so you can safely click Yes (see screenshot above) to continue. You wouldn't have seen this message before because the Python-related aspect was introduced only with VirtualBox 7.

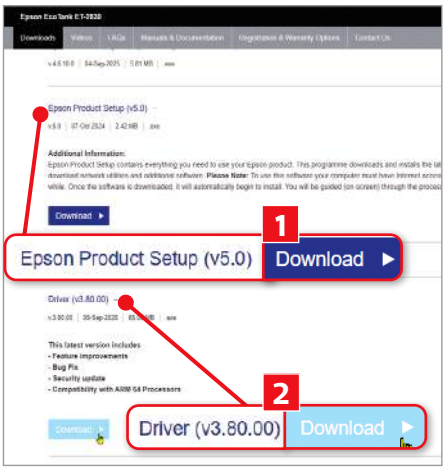
We should also say that this message can be avoided entirely by tweaking the installation instructions at the start.

To do this, click to expand the VirtualBox Python Support dropdown menu and then choose 'Entire feature will be unavailable' (see screenshot above) – then click Next to proceed.

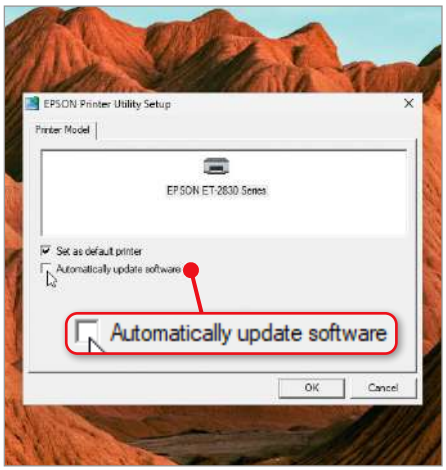
How can I get a driver without internet access?

Q I recently purchased an Epson ET-2830 printer, but there was no installation disc in the box. I don't have an internet connection at home. So I had to visit an internet cafe to download what Epson's instructions said. When I got home again to use it, this turned out to be just an 'installer' that was of no use to anyone lacking internet access. Is there anywhere I can get an ISO file that contains the printer drivers so I can write them to CD?

Paul Holt



Avoid the Epson Product Setup file (v5.0) file and download 'Driver (v3.80.00)' instead



Untick this option to stop the driver looking for online updates in future

A Few printers these days include an installation disc. Manufacturers assume that most people will have an internet connection, and it allows them to ensure that only the latest versions of drivers are installed.

But that reality doesn't help you. The good news is that your own solution was basically the correct one. The bad news is that you unfortunately downloaded the wrong file when at the internet cafe.

We think you downloaded the Epson Product Setup (v5.0) file (1 in our screenshot above), which is under the Product Setup heading on the Epson support website for your model (at www.snipca.com/56388). However, what you actually need is the full driver package, labelled 'Driver (v3.80.00)' 2, under the Drivers heading – a bit lower down the page. So, you'll need to return to the internet cafe and click the Download button here, instead.

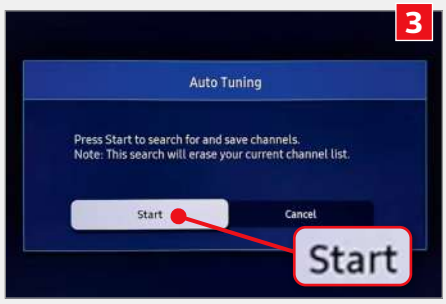
Finally, to avoid further problems after setup, be sure to remove the tick from the 'Automatically update software' box (see screenshot above): this will stop the driver looking for online updates.

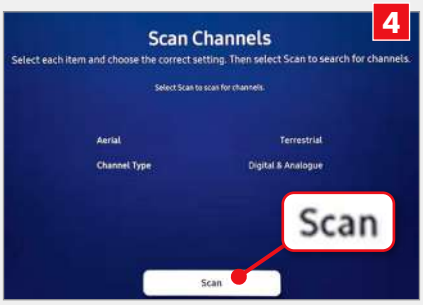
Can I watch Freeview or Freesat on my Samsung TV set?

Q I recently purchased a Samsung S90D TV set. I mainly stream TV programmes but I cannot work out if this TV has Freeview or Freesat included, or if I need to buy a separate receiver.

Dave Butler

To add Freeview channels via the initial setup of your Samsung TV, follow these steps





A There's plenty of confusion about whether new Samsung TVs have Freeview (or indeed Freesat) – mainly due to poor documentation and confusing setup. Your TV's specifications do include a DVB-T2CS2 tuner, which in the UK means Freeview over a traditional RF/UHF cable – typically from a rooftop aerial. Your set's built-in tuner does not support Freesat.

The trouble is that, unless the tuning option is chosen during initial setup, the Samsung TV Plus app forces its way to the fore – and then it seems impossible to add Freeview channels. The trick is to start again by performing a factory reset.

To do this, choose Settings followed by All Settings, and then 'General & Privacy' followed by 'Factory data reset'. When that's done, return to All Settings then choose Broadcasting (1 in our screenshot top) followed by Auto Tuning Settings and then Auto Tuning 2 – and then follow the prompts 3 and 4.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

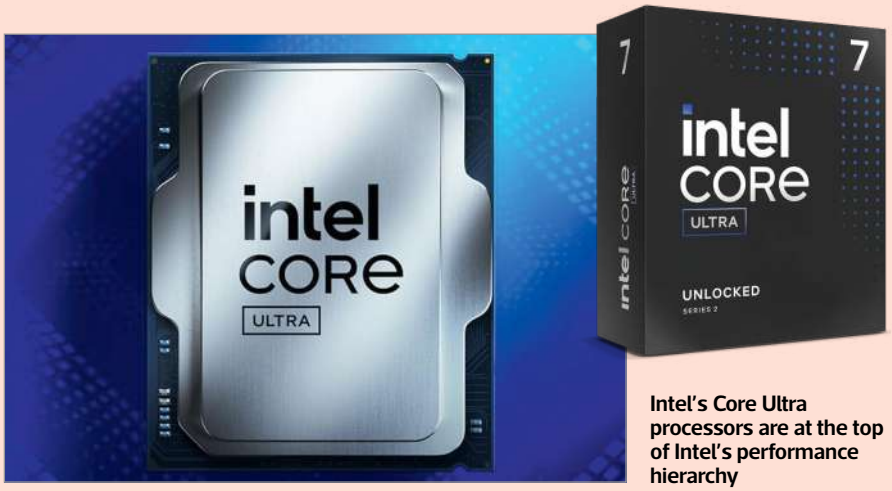
i7, Core 7 and Core Ultra 7 processors?

Q My HP all-in-one desktop PC, bought in 2019, is beginning to show its age. So, I've started to look for a replacement.

Previously, I've looked for the term 'i7' when shopping for PCs, which told me something about the speed of the computer's processor. My understanding was to never purchase any laptop or desktop below i7, because they would be too slow for me.

Now I see wording such as 'Ultra 7' when looking at new desktop PCs. Is Ultra 7 the new equivalent of i7? If not, what words should I be looking for the equivalent of i7 to ensure it won't go at a snail's pace?

Lynn Sharpe



Intel's Core Ultra processors are at the top of Intel's performance hierarchy

A Not so long back, buying a PC could be more or less as simple as you describe. Intel offered a range of consumer processors branded as Core i3, i5 and i7 – with i7 as the top dog. The company did later add an i9, but by opting for an i7, you knew you'd get a speedy machine.

But a couple of years ago, Intel apparently decided that the 'i' prefix sounded a bit old hat, harking as it did back to earlier days of computing, so it ditched it from consumer branding. This resulted in Core 3, 5, 7 and 9.

At the same time, the chip-maker introduced a higher-tier range under the name 'Core Ultra' – Core Ultra 5, 7 and 9 (there's no 3). They now sit at the top of Intel's performance hierarchy, in the world of consumer PCs at least, with extra bells and whistles like enhanced graphics and AI features.

So, while a Core 7 is effectively a direct successor to your trusty Core i7, a Core Ultra 7 will usually outperform it in raw speed and extra features. Fortunately, your old rule of thumb can still be broadly applied. Whatever PC you buy, if the processor is a Core 7 or Ultra 7, you know it's up to snuff.

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Where do I plug my phone into a new router?

Q Do faster routers have a dedicated telephone socket? I've never seen this mentioned in the various reviews I've read. I'm on full-fibre broadband and currently have a BT Smart Hub 2. My landline phone plugs into a standard phone socket on the back – coloured green. If I decided to upgrade my router or ISP, how would I connect my phone?

Emm Archer

To use an ISP's VoIP service, you'll need to use an adapter like this

A The Smart Hub 2 is pretty unusual in having a built-in socket specifically designed for a traditional UK landline phone terminal, technically known as a BT 431A plug. This plug-and-socket combo was introduced by British Telecom in the early 1980s. Obviously, it then became a standard in the UK.

However, beyond our shores BT 431A is little more than a curiosity, much like our three-pin mains plugs. That's why few if any other routers have a socket for this plug. BT includes it because its own Digital Voice offering, as its VoIP service is known, accepts traditional landline phones – so customers can just plug in and go.

Many other ISPs offer their own VoIP services and some will supply their own router when you sign up for broadband. If you additionally sign up for a VoIP service, they'll send you an adapter. One end of this plugs into a standard Ethernet socket on the back of any modern router, while the other end provider a socket for a BT 431A plug (as pictured left).

If not, or you simply want to plough your own furrow with a VoIP-compatible router of your choice, buy an adapter for around £5 (www.snipca.com/56389).

Next Issue

ON SALE Weds 19 Oct

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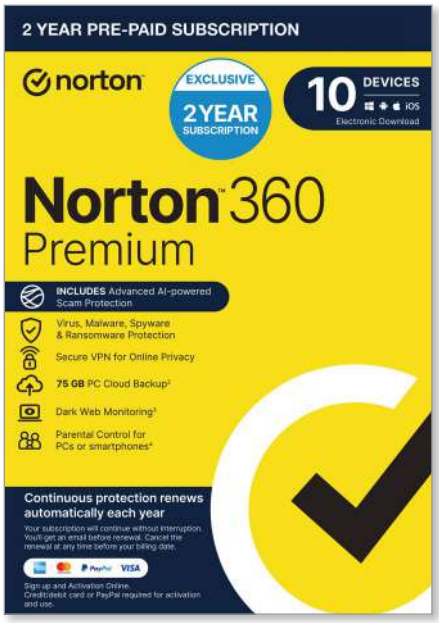

Norton is made by NortonLifeLock Inc – a standalone company dedicated to consumer cyber safety. It has always performed strongly in *Computeractive* antivirus tests, so we highly recommend it.

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*while stocks last

Problems **Solved**

Reader Support

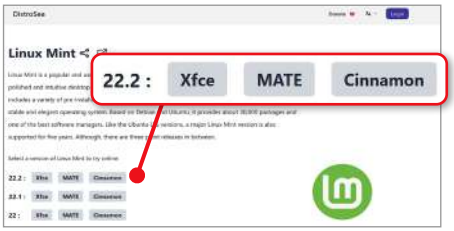
Having a problem with our recommended software or expert tips? Email **editor@computeractive.co.uk** and we'll do our best to help

Why can't I download Linux?

Q I had decided even before reading your Windows 10 Survival Guide in Issue 718 that I was going to switch to Linux Mint or Zorin. I visited DistroSea (www.distrosea.com) as you suggested in order to test them, but was unable to download either Mint or Zorin. I tried it on three different browsers (Chrome, DuckDuckGo and Edge), all without success. Can you help?

Geof French

A DistroSea isn't for downloading Linux distros – it's for trying them in a browser window before you install them. On the homepage, you'll find icons for both Linux Mint and Zorin OS. Click either one, then click the version of the distro you'd like to try (we recommend the latest Cinnamon edition of Linux Mint – see screenshot below – or the latest Core64 version of Zorin OS).



Select the latest version of Cinnamon in DistroSea to try it in your web browser

If the DistroSea site is busy, you may need to wait in a queue. Tick the 'Verify you are human' box, if prompted, then click the Start Zorin OS/Linux Mint button and wait until your chosen distro loads.

If you decide you want to download one after trying them, head to www.snipca.com/54892 (for Zorin OS) or www.snipca.com/56593 (for Linux Mint).

Is Files 4.0 safe to download?

Q I downloaded Files 4.0 from www.snipca.com/56242, as you recommend in Issue 719 (page 18), and it seems to be a marked improvement on File Explorer. But my Norton Antivirus software has quarantined it, warning that it contains a Trojan called 'IDP.Generi. Is this a false positive?

Peter Varley

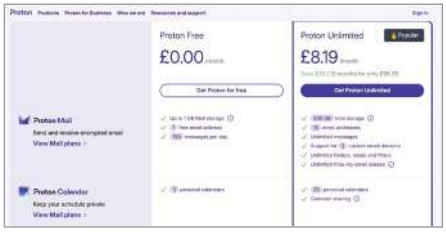
A Files 4.0 is perfectly safe, so this is almost certainly a false positive, as you suggest. You should be able to restore the download from Norton's quarantine and install it as normal. According to Norton's support pages (www.snipca.com/56624), you do this by clicking Security, Security History, then selecting Quarantine in the Recent History dropdown menu. Select 'Files' in the list, then click the menu (three horizontal dots) next to it and choose 'Create exception & restore'.

Can I sign up to all of Proton's services?

Q I want to stop being bombarded by adverts, emails and trackers, so I'm keen to try Proton's various privacy-focused tools, having been interested in several of your recent recommendations. But I'm not sure whether I can sign up to all of Proton's services (email, VPN, storage etc) in one subscription – making it cheaper than paying for each separately.

Simon Bennett

A Try Proton's Unlimited subscription tier (www.snipca.com/56625). It costs £10.59 a month; £8.19 a month if you commit to a year (see screenshot below); and £6.59 if you commit to two years. It includes Proton's VPN, mail and storage, as well as its calendar and password manager.



Proton Unlimited costs £8.19 a month if you commit to a year

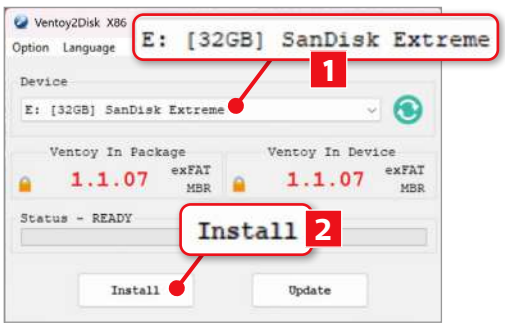
Is it safe to install Ventoy and run Linux on my USB?

Q In Issue 716's Cover Feature ('Stop wasting your USB stick') you gave instructions on using Ventoy (www.snipca.com/55677) to install Linux distros on a USB stick. I followed your advice but when I try to install Ventoy I get the warning 'Careful not to install on PC'. Should I abandon the installation or press 'Install' on my stick? I'm reluctant to install over my current version of Windows. I've looked online, but I can't find any help.

Philip Thompson

A You're right to be cautious. That warning appears because Ventoy's installer can overwrite any drive you select, including your Windows system drive, so you definitely don't want to click 'Install' with anything other than your USB stick selected.

The safe way to proceed is to insert your USB stick, making sure it's the only removable drive connected to your computer, so you don't accidentally pick the wrong one. Open the Ventoy installer, select the USB stick as the target (1 in our screenshot below), then click Install 2. This will set up Ventoy on the USB stick only. It will erase any existing data on that stick, but your PC and Windows installation remain untouched.



In Ventoy, make sure your USB stick is selected before clicking Install

Jargon Buster

1080p/1440p Common types of high-definition video of 1920x1080 and 2560x1440 pixels respectively.

4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

ANC Active noise cancelling. Method for reducing unwanted sound by adding a second sound designed to cancel the first.

ARM Processors that are more energy-efficient than those made by AMD and Intel.

ARP Address Resolution Protocol. Maps a device's IP address to its physical MAC address on a local network.

Augmented reality Lets you view the real world on a screen and add virtual elements.

Beamforming A technique for microphones to pick up on specific sources of sound and reduce background noise.

Benchmarking Comparing software and products with an accepted standard.

Beta A version of software that's being tested.

Biometric Using measurable personal characteristics, such as fingerprints, for identification.

BIOS Software built into every PC that connects the vital components.

Bot Automated software designed to perform specific tasks.

Cache A temporary space for storing information.

Chatbot An AI program designed to recreate conversation with humans.

Chiclet Small, flat, square keys with rounded corners.

Clock speed The speed at which a processor can perform operations. Measured in Gigahertz (GHz).

Coaxial A type of cable where one wire is surrounded by insulation, then surrounded by another wire.

Code Written instructions that tell software how to execute tasks.

Codec A file that tells a PC how to record or play a type of media file.

Copilot+ An enhanced version of Microsoft's Copilot AI tool.

Core Units on a processor that carry out program instructions.

Dark mode Showing white text on a black background.

DDR5 The newest, fastest type of computer memory.

Digital modulator Converts data into a broadcast signal for transmission.

DisplayPort A socket for connecting monitors.

Distro A version of the Linux OS and the programs that go with it.

DNS A technology that associates computers with their addresses on the internet.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with an external device.

Emoji A small graphic that can be inserted into a text or email.

End-to-end encryption Encrypting messages so only the sender and recipient can read them.

Equaliser Changes the tone of music produced by a PC or player.

eSIM A virtual SIM card that's built into a phone.

Ethernet A standard used for almost all wired computer networks.

Factory reset Restoring a device to the manufacturer's default settings.

False positive When an antivirus program wrongly detects a malware infection.

Frame rate Number of still images, or frames, shown per second (**fps**) to create a moving image.

GDPR 2018 EU law strengthening people's privacy.

GIF A type of image file often used on the web.

Graphics card PC component that produces the image on a monitor.

HDMI Connection that transmits high-definition video and audio.

Hotspot A public area covered by a Wi-Fi network that allows you to access the internet.

HTML The language used to write most web pages.

Hz Hertz. Measures the frequency something happens: 1Hz equals once a second.

Incognito mode A browser mode that doesn't save your history

IP address A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IP54 Provides limited protection from dust and water.

IP55 Indicates a device has been tested against dust and water for up to 55 minutes

IP67 Resistant to dust, general dirt and sand, and can be placed underwater for 30 minutes.

ISO file A type of image file that contains data from a CD or DVD.

JPEG A common type of image file created by most digital cameras.

LED Light-emitting diode. An electronic device that emits light.

M.2 A standard specification for PC expansion cards and connectors.

mAh Milliamp hours. A unit that measures (electric) power over time. The higher the mAh, the longer a battery will last.

mDNS Multicast DNS. A network protocol that lets devices on the same local network find each other without needing a central DNS server.

Membrane keyboard Keyboards that use rubber domes that connect to small electrical contacts.

Micro HDMI An HDMI connector measuring 6.4x2.8mm.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card.

MIL-STD-810H A US military standard that tests durability of devices under extreme conditions.

Miracast Wireless standard for sending video and audio from one device (like a phone or laptop) to another (like a TV or monitor).

Mirror To display on your TV what's on your PC or tablet screen.

MKV An open-source type of video file that can contain audio, video and text for subtitles.

MVNO A mobile provider that piggybacks on another network.

NetBIOS Network Basic Input/Output System. Old protocol that lets computers identify themselves on a local network.

Noise cancellation See ANC.

OCuLink Connectivity standard that allows high-speed data transfers between devices using PCI Express.

ODF Open-source office format supported LibreOffice and OnlyOffice.

OLED A thin-film organic light-emitting diode used in computer displays and television screens.

PAC A unique code that lets users retain their mobile phone number when switching operators.

PCIe A faster version of PCI – a slot on the motherboard for sound and memory cards.

Ping A way to measure how quickly your device gets a response after sending a request for information via the internet.

PNG A format for images that shrinks file sizes.

Progressive web app A website that looks and works like an app.

Python A simple programming language popular with beginners.

QR code A barcode that can be read using smartphones.

Read speed How long it takes a hard drive to 'read' data, and respond to it.

Refresh rate The number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn.

RF Radio Frequency. Part of the electromagnetic spectrum used for wireless communication.

RGB An image created on a monitor by combining a value for red, green and blue channels.

RGB keyboard Advanced type of LED backlit keyboards.

Roaming charge Fee incurred for using your phone to receive data via overseas mobile networks.

SBC codec Audio compression format used mainly in Bluetooth headphones and speakers.

Scissor switch Keys that have two plastic pieces that interlock in a scissor-like fashion.

Script A short program stored on a server to control part of a website.

SD card A type of memory card.

SIM The smart card used by all digital mobile phones.

Spectrometry A technique for measuring properties of light or other electromagnetic radiation to identify materials or chemicals.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that uses no moving parts.

SSDP Network protocol that helps devices find each other.

Switch Mechanism under a keyboard that determines whether a key has been pressed.

System restore point Collection of system files to which Windows can revert if a problem occurs.

Tag A keyword used to describe a file or web page.

Temporary file Created by sites to store info for a specific purpose.

Thread Smallest sequence of instructions that can be managed by a processor.

Thunderbolt A very fast port for connecting external storage to a PC.

TPM A chip that stores keys which encrypt data on your hard drive.

Trojan A malicious computer program that's disguised as a different, harmless program.

UEFI A modern replacement for the BIOS

UHF Radio waves with frequencies from 300MHz to 3GHz, used for TV, radio and wireless devices.

Ultrawide Offering a field of view that's wider than digital cameras.

Upscale Creating a larger version of a photo without sacrificing clarity and detail.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1/3.2/4.0 Faster successors to USB.

USB-A The original type of USB connector, released in 1996.

USB-C A connector that's reversible.

VESA A standard mount for attaching monitors on to stands, walls and PCs.

VGA An older standard socket for connecting a monitor to a PC.

VoIP Voice over IP. The routing of voice conversations over the web.

VPN Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

Wi-Fi 6 Wi-Fi standard with speeds up to 10 times faster than 802.11ac.

Wi-Fi 6E Wi-Fi 6 extended to include the 6GHz band.

Wi-Fi 7 Has speed of around 46Gbps.

Widget A small program that runs on the Windows desktop.

Wireless access point A device that lets Wi-Fi devices connect to a wired network and the internet.

Write speed How long it takes a hard drive to save data.

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Go to www.snipca.com/55902 for full details

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Know How

Now Perplexity has made its new Comet browser available for free, **Robert Irvine** tries to...

Browse the web using AI

Look – up in the sky! It's a search engine, it's a chatbot, it's a browser – it's Perplexity Comet! And it promises to let you do *anything*, which is a bold claim. Even Superman has his limits.

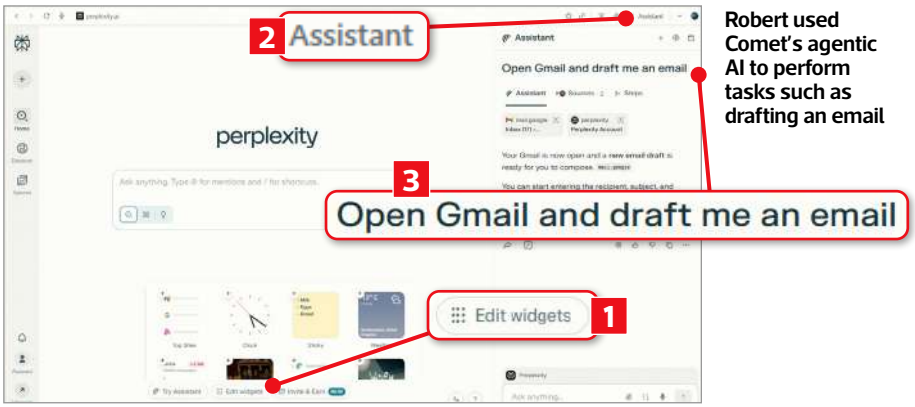
As a fan of Perplexity's AI-powered 'answer engine' (www.perplexity.ai), I've been eager to try its new AI browser Comet since it launched in July. But I certainly wasn't going to pay $200 (about £150) a month for the privilege, so was pleased when – as we explained in our Cover Feature in Issue 721 (page 56) – Perplexity made Comet available for free in October.

> An exciting way to browse and leaves Chrome in the (space) dust

I downloaded the new browser from www.snipca.com/56646, ran the installer and clicked Launch Comet. I was greeted by a celestial animation with an ambient soundtrack and a 'Welcome to Comet' message. I clicked 'Get started' and Comet gave me the option to import my browsing history, settings, bookmarks and passwords from another browser. But because I wanted a clean start, I chose 'Do this later'.

Next, I entered a profile name and selected an astronomical avatar. Comet asked for my permission to set it as my default browser, among other requests. I declined all for the time being and clicked Start Comet.

The browser opened and prompted me to sign in with my Perplexity account to "unlock the full power of Comet". I duly obliged, clicked 'Skip for now' when I was again asked to import browser data and make Comet my default, and finally got a proper look at the browser.



Robert used Comet's agentic AI to perform tasks such as drafting an email

Its minimalist appearance is similar to Chrome's – unsurprising as Comet is based on Chromium – and the homepage is essentially the same as the Perplexity website's. It features a large search/message box containing icons for switching the AI model, attaching files and activating voice mode, and a left-hand sidebar with tabs for Perplexity's Discover and Spaces features.

An 'Edit widgets' button at the bottom of the page (1 in our screenshot above) lets you customise the homepage with widgets including a clock, weather forecast, to-do list and a game called 'wormhole'. However, I hadn't installed the browser for its widgets, but to explore its advanced AI capabilities.

The main AI tool is Assistant, which you access by clicking that button in the top-right corner 2 or the Try Assistant option at the bottom of the homepage. This opens a right-hand side panel where you can chat to Assistant, ask it to summarise the current page and take screenshots of specific elements to learn more about them. So far, so Copilot, but Comet's 'agentic' aspect means it can also perform tasks for you.

I asked it to open Amazon in a new tab, which it immediately did, then to find me the best deals on smart TVs. It searched Amazon, loaded the results in the main tab then used 'reasoning' to analyse the prices and customer ratings of the TVs. It settled on a 32in Samsung set for £179, which was a bit small but undoubtedly a good deal.

Next, I told Comet Assistant to open Gmail and draft me an email 3. It got the first part right, but for the second I needed to enter a 'Compose an email' prompt. I fixed this by enabling the 'Gmail with Calendar' connector in my account settings, so when I repeated the request, Assistant leapt into action, opened a Compose window in Gmail and generated a message based on my instructions.

Sadly, after trying a few more prompts I hit my limit for free Perplexity Pro requests, which ruled out further 'agentic' tricks for the day – a subscription costs $20 (about £15) a month. However, I could still get answers to questions, enjoy Comet's fast and ad-free browsing, and install extensions from the Chrome Web Store.

It's early days for the AI browser, and the restrictions of Perplexity's free plan could prove annoying, but Comet promises to be an exciting new way to browse the web and leaves Chrome in the (space) dust.

Need help with other AI tools? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Next issue: Robert tries to transfer files by scanning codes

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